

What's  
the Big  
Idea ?

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A word from our sponsor, David Lopilato:

In a May 2nd opinion piece in *Bethesda Beat*, I argued that secondary schools and colleges should abandon three things in order to come back stronger:

- Standardized tests as they exist today
- School rankings
- The 4.0 grade-point system

In response, *wojtek*, a self-described college recruitment specialist wrote in the comment section:

"I must say this is one of the worst ideas I have ever heard... Because when I see a rec letter that says 'one of the top students I encountered in my career', the first thing I do is check how old the letter writer is. The second thing I do is check the school where the person teaches... And if the school name doesn't ring a bell, then I check whichever rankings I can put my hands on."

I offer up this anecdote for three reasons:

1. Whoever said, "Don't read the Comment Section" has never enjoyed the rush of going at it with the likes of *wojtek* and *Privileged*.
2. The comment is a telling window into a troubling development, namely students from only 18% of U.S. high schools make up 79 % percent of all college admissions and it has been that way for more than a decade.
3. The time to toss up ideas for how schools can come back stronger (your "worst" ideas or otherwise) is now.

So, here we are - a good time for big ideas. Without further ado, *The Tattler* editors.

## EDITORIAL

A good idea can change minds. A great idea can change hearts. A brilliant idea can change history. The "Big Idea" edition sets out to change our approach to education.

In this edition, we explore big ideas just right for B-CC (for example reimagining the cafeteria), bigger ideas for MCPS (for example, keeping Wednesdays independent) and really big ideas for schools across the country (for example year-round-school). Reporters reached out to former Education Secretary Arnie Duncan and the Wall Street Journal's Greg Ip to explore the country-wide ideas.

It is no secret that public school, the so-called "noble experiment" and "great equalizer," has time and time again been shown to perpetuate the patterns of discrimination that have been so deeply embedded in American society. This disparity has only been exasperated during the pandemic. We just learned from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center that Fall 2020 saw a 36.2 % drop in graduates from high-poverty high schools and a 16.4% decline from low-poverty schools. No argument for the distribution of talent, aptitude, or worthiness can make up for the gaping disparities in outcomes that show up school by school. Your access to what some believe to be the literal fuel of the human spirit is a function of your area code, or your parents annual income.

It is also no secret that even learning in the best of counties is uneven and inadequate. Here in Montgomery County, you can find two elementary schools (just 11.5 miles apart)- 91.2% of third-graders can read at or above grade level at one, and 16.5% at the other.

Finally, it is no secret that students at all schools (affluent and high-poverty, IB and non-IB, magnate, charter, public and private) experience alarming levels of anxiety. Pre-pandemic studies calculated that 33% of high school students suffer from some form of an anxiety disorder. With the pandemic still raging, one can only imagine what the percentage is today.

We invited members of the *The Tattler* to report on and come up with ambitious solutions for our educational ills.

Challenge accepted.

We believe that this edition of *The Tattler* encapsulates both the voice of students and our core vision for the future of education.

During a meeting on Tuesday, January 12, the Montgomery County Board of Education voted 7-1 to delay its reopening plan for the third time, pushing back the Feb. 1 start date until at least March 15 — more than a year after buildings closed.

The editors of *The Tattler*,  
[tattlerextra.org](http://tattlerextra.org), and SDTV

# The Death and Need for Revival of Free Speech in Schools

BY ELI GLICKMAN

Polarization is taking modern society by storm. In the wake of a year that tested the limits of every single person, socially, economically, mentally, and politically, we—the B-CC community—must ensure that, in 2021, students have a place to break through the barricade of polarization and find a way to make society better. That was not always as tall an order as it is today. Free speech is on the decline in America, due—in large part—to the popularity of polarization and extreme politicization of thought. A 2017 publication by Pew Research shows that over 80% of both Republicans and Democrats hold unfavorable views of members of the opposite political affiliation.

This extreme polarization has taken its toll on the ability to freely express ideas on campus. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education published a report in September of 2020 that explains “60% of students reported feeling that they could not express an opinion because of how students, a professor, or their administration would respond.” The same issue exists at B-CC, where political, racial, socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic demographics are skewed heavily in one direction. A junior who wishes to remain anonymous said, “as someone who tends to be more conservative, I seldom share my true views in school... I even fear making arguments that aren’t even conservative but [just] differ from the mainstream.” Another student, a B-CC senior, said that they’ve experienced similar feelings, “I’ve started to just not even give my honest opin-

ions in discussions... because I know everyone will... attack me for it.”

This absence of free circulation of thought and speech has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With our classes now fully virtual, many students now abstain from speaking entirely. We must formulate a plan to encourage a revival of free expression when we return to in-person schooling.

To breathe life back into the rich tradition of free speech as a community, we must accomplish three things: we must separate ideas from people, we must be willing to listen, and the school’s administration must work to promote a culture that has diverse ideas and open discourse.

The decline of free speech is indubitably driven by the intense polarization society faces today. When people are treated as inseparable from their ideas, problem solving will categorically fail. To solve problems and cooperate, people must be able to recognize each other’s humanity and treat one another civilly. This is impossible in a world where disagreements over ideas increasingly drive people to dislike one another. The late Justice Antonin Scalia captured this idea well saying, “I attack ideas. I don’t attack people. And some very good people have some very bad ideas.” If we promote a society in which people are not ostracized or punished for their ideas, we can create a society where everyone is willing to engage in discussion.

The next reform that we must adopt is a willingness to listen. By treating all people with respect and empathy, we can open the gates to the

sharing of ideas; for the sharing of ideas to be valuable, we must be willing to listen and learn. The friendship between Harvard Professor Cornel West, a democratic-socialist, and Princeton Professor Robert George, a conservative, demonstrates that willingness to learn and listen can cut across partisan lines. In an article for the Boston Globe, the two professors declared, “We need the honesty and courage to consider with an open mind and heart points of view that challenge our beliefs -- even our deepest, most cherished identity-forming beliefs. We need the intellectual humility to recognize our own fallibility -- and that, too, requires honesty and courage.”

Lastly, the school must expend its support for a restoration of free speech by promoting a narrative of inclusivity and open dialogue. The B-CC administration ought to take an active role in promoting and organizing events that encourage discussions among the student body on a wide variety of current issues that impact all of us.

Schools ought to be safe havens for intellectual development, where free thought is encouraged and respectful, and open dialogue is common. This proud intellectual tradition of discourse has been tarnished by our preoccupation with labels that render us totally unable to participate in substantive discussion. Through promoting respect and civility, opening our minds, and a continuation of event-based programs that encourage discourse, we can help to ensure that when students return to B-CC, free speech reigns once more.

## Rep. Raskin's Enduring Fight for Student Press

BY DEVLIN ORLIN

Maryland school newspapers, in pursuit of the free press, should forever be thankful to Jamie Raskin for his time at our state legislature. As the Student Press Law Center writes, in 2016, Raskin served as a state Senator and introduced the Maryland New Voices bill, which protects high school and college journalists from prior restraint, or a school administration preemptively not allowing a story to be published. The bill, now signed into law, additionally prevents retaliation

against school paper sponsors for stories possibly critical of school policies, a protection key to a paper’s right to seek the truth and justly inform its audience.

These landmark safeguards, which also include if the paper is published as part of a class or with school financial resources, stem from Raskin’s tenure as a constitutional law professor and his book *We the Students: Supreme Court Cases for and about Students*, which discusses *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, a Supreme Court case that sup-

posed the power of a school’s administration to utilize prior restraint, and which Raskin’s New Voices law clarified and diminished at the state level. Newspapers journalistically and legally retain the requirement to not harass or slander, but the Tattler and papers across the state should consider and be thankful for the championship of students’ rights and civil liberties that then-Sen. Raskin exhibited in the Maryland Legislature, and for which US Rep. Raskin currently fights in the House of Representatives.

On December 31st, 2020, Tommy Raskin tragically passed away. While we did not get the chance to know Tommy, his passion for activism and education inspired all of us to be more ethical and empathetic citizens. It would be unfair for us to try and attest to his legacy when those who know him best have already done so. The work of the Raskin family continues to inspire us all, and for that we dedicate this edition to them.

Congressman Jamie Raskin and Sarah Bloom Raskin released a beautiful statement speaking to the life and legacy of their son. We

encourage each and every one of you to read it. There is no better way to understand Tommy Raskin’s story than to hear it from those who love him most.

Visit [tinyurl.com/TommyRaskinLife](https://tinyurl.com/TommyRaskinLife) to read the full statement from Congressman Jamie Raskin and Sarah Bloom Raskin.

Please also consider contributing to the Tommy Raskin Memorial fund for People and Animals.



# January 6, 2021

*President-Elect Biden commented on the events of Jan 6th, "Think what our children who are watching television are thinking."*

*In the spirit of allowing students free speech, we share how high school students processed the events.*

"I was extremely upset at videos and photos I saw online of officers taking selfies with or high-fiving the rioters. At the same time, I'm glad that some of the law enforcement tried to deescalate [the] situation before resorting to violence (although I realize the disparity in that reaction versus their reaction to BLM protests). I think it would have ended much worse had they begun opening fire on large crowds or using fatal violence where it was not absolutely necessary. That being said, the contrast in the treatment of these rioters and the BLM protestors really highlights to me that the police in our nation are historically and continually in place to repress marginalized groups and people of color. I hope this illuminates that for people who did not see it before."

-Anonymous

"Our government needs to reflect and rebuild. Over the past four years of Trump's presidency racism, hate, and injustice has been accentuated. My hope is that over the course of the next four years under Biden, our country will start to heal and take time to create reforms and policies that encourage diversity, celebrate peaceful social justice reforms, and rebuild democracy."

-Lola Nordlinger

"I'm honestly grateful that no more blood was shed. I am, of course, upset that there had to have been lives lost, but I think it had the potential to be even worse. I am so frustrated with Trump's response to what happened, but I am glad some of his fellow Republican lawmakers had the guts to speak against him and acknowledge how horrible and unacceptable this situation was."

-Anonymous

"The reactions of law enforcement are a perfect representation of the systemic racism that is prevalent and extremely harmful in America. It's really a joke to compare the response of police to this literal domestic terrorist attack to the Black Lives Matter protests that took place the past year. BLM protestors, who were overwhelmingly peaceful throughout the country, were regularly met with brutality and escalation from law enforcement. In the situations where riots broke out, it was often due to agitation from police and federal troops coming in. Thousands of arrests took place and people were killed. This was in response to people's more than legitimate grievances with the treatment of black people in the U.S. When mobs of Trump supporters invade the Capitol, the police are seen taking pictures with them, escorting them nicely down the steps and out of the building, and attempting to deescalate the situation as much as possible. This is in response to completely unjustified anger over an election that has been proven to have been without any sort of widespread voter fraud. The people storming the building were live streaming themselves doing so, not wearing masks--proudly displaying their breaking of high level law. They did all this without any fear of repercussions since they knew there wouldn't be any. White supremacists who support the status quo of racial injustice in the U.S. know that they will be supported by the police and government. Is the police response really surprising when 80% of cops voted for Trump in 2016? And all of this is not to say that police should be gunning down the people rushing the Capitol or reacting with the brutality dished out to BLM protestors. It's to say that black people and those fighting against real injustice deserve the same kind of understanding and deescalating style of law enforcement that was afforded to the insane people storming this government building. What happened yesterday was one of the most blatant displays of white privilege and power in this country that I have seen in my lifetime."

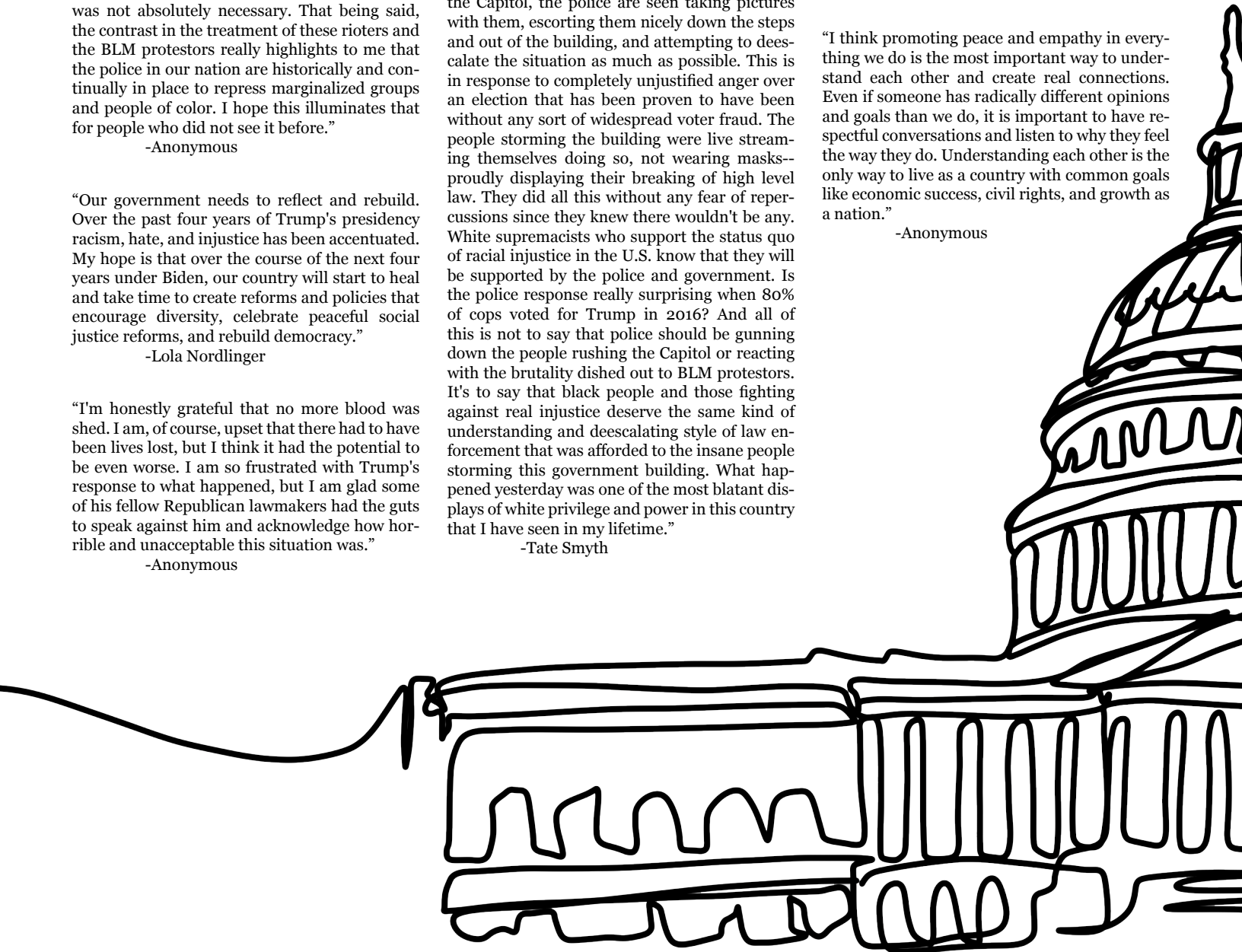
-Tate Smyth

"A lot of people are saying that the protesters were all wrong, that everything about them is wrong. My family and I were discussing that the principle of protesting and disputing elections is a crucial part of a democracy. Without this ability, our society would become very dangerous. BUT, it crosses the line when the election has been certified, and re-certified, and re-certified by neutral election officials and dozens of judges. Then, the dangerous part is not the election-certifiers, but the radicals who keep on insisting that the professionals are wrong. Yesterday, we saw how dangerous this pre-determining your opinion of the rightful winner of a democratic election before the election is over can be."

-Micah Schuchman

"I think promoting peace and empathy in everything we do is the most important way to understand each other and create real connections. Even if someone has radically different opinions and goals than we do, it is important to have respectful conversations and listen to why they feel the way they do. Understanding each other is the only way to live as a country with common goals like economic success, civil rights, and growth as a nation."

-Anonymous





"I'm angrier now. There was obvious racism and bias during the event. If this was a Black Lives Matter protest, there would have been tear gas and rubber bullets. There would have been many more arrests and probably much more violence. The National Guard was not called, unlike the Black Lives Matter protests. This just proves that white privilege is still very present in America. If people of color had done this there would have been much more violence and many deaths. The white men in the building were taking pictures with the police officers. These people make me sick to my stomach. People brought the Confederate flag into the Capitol, which didn't even happen in the Civil War. I think that says a lot about the situation. By bringing the American flag into the building, they were basically saying that this is America. This is currently what the American flag represents. Because of these kinds of people, this is now what America is. It must be heartbreaking for the people who came here for a new life. It must be heartbreaking for the soldiers who died for the freedom of the people. I am just absolutely disgusted to be related to any of this type of stuff."

-Anonymous

"I am disappointed with all lawmakers who throughout the past weeks entertained the President's dangerous narrative of a 'stolen election'. I believe that a lot of violence and pain could have been spared had all lawmakers simply joined together for the sake of our democracy in direct contradiction of what the President was saying."

-Sammy Schuchman

"Republican commentators like Tucker Carlson need to be held 100% responsible for pushing conservative propaganda and agitating people throughout the country to this point. The actions of people like him, in spreading false narratives of election fraud, directly led to the events of yesterday. Listening to Carlson describe the tragedy of the white woman who was killed by police while storming the Capitol yesterday was truly one of the most sickening things. This woman certainly should not be dead today, but the fact that Fox News will dedicate a whole segment to remembering her and thinking about how her family feels now is truly disgusting when contrasting that with their coverage of the murders of people like George Floyd and Jacob Blake. People like Carlson are truly pieces of human filth."

-Tate Smyth

"I have lived in the DC area my whole life. I know how seriously guarded these buildings are. They could not have gotten in the Capitol that easily, unless some members of law enforcement didn't let them. Also, seeing the double standard and the comparison between how police treated the rioters and terrorists from yesterday to the peaceful protesters from the BLM movement was infuriating."

-Laura Julia Fleischmann

"I felt sick. I was terrified that there would be a mass shooting or bombing by the rioters. I was also worried that our government's enemies, whether international or domestic, would take advantage of this chaos and attack our nation in some way. The video of the rioters chasing a police officer up the stairs inside the Capitol that aired on MSNBC made me realize how completely out of hand and unpredictable this was. Seeing the photos and footage of people walking around the Capitol with Confederate flags, weapons, and hateful signs made my stomach drop."

-Anonymous

"People need to stop saying 'this is not who we are.' This is exactly who we are. This country has been like this for hundreds of years. For people to just be noticing or acknowledging it is the definition of 'white privilege.' Minorities have been going through this type of oppression and racism for a very long time in America. Stop denying things that have been happening and let's start trying to change it."

-Layla Hamzaoui

"In order to reunite this country, I believe that communication is extremely important. Because our political parties are so polarized, it is vital that we make an effort to close that gap to ensure unity and prosperity among everyone. It will take pressure off of people's political beliefs. Especially those who are more politically independent, because they won't be shamed if they disagree with the party they lean towards."

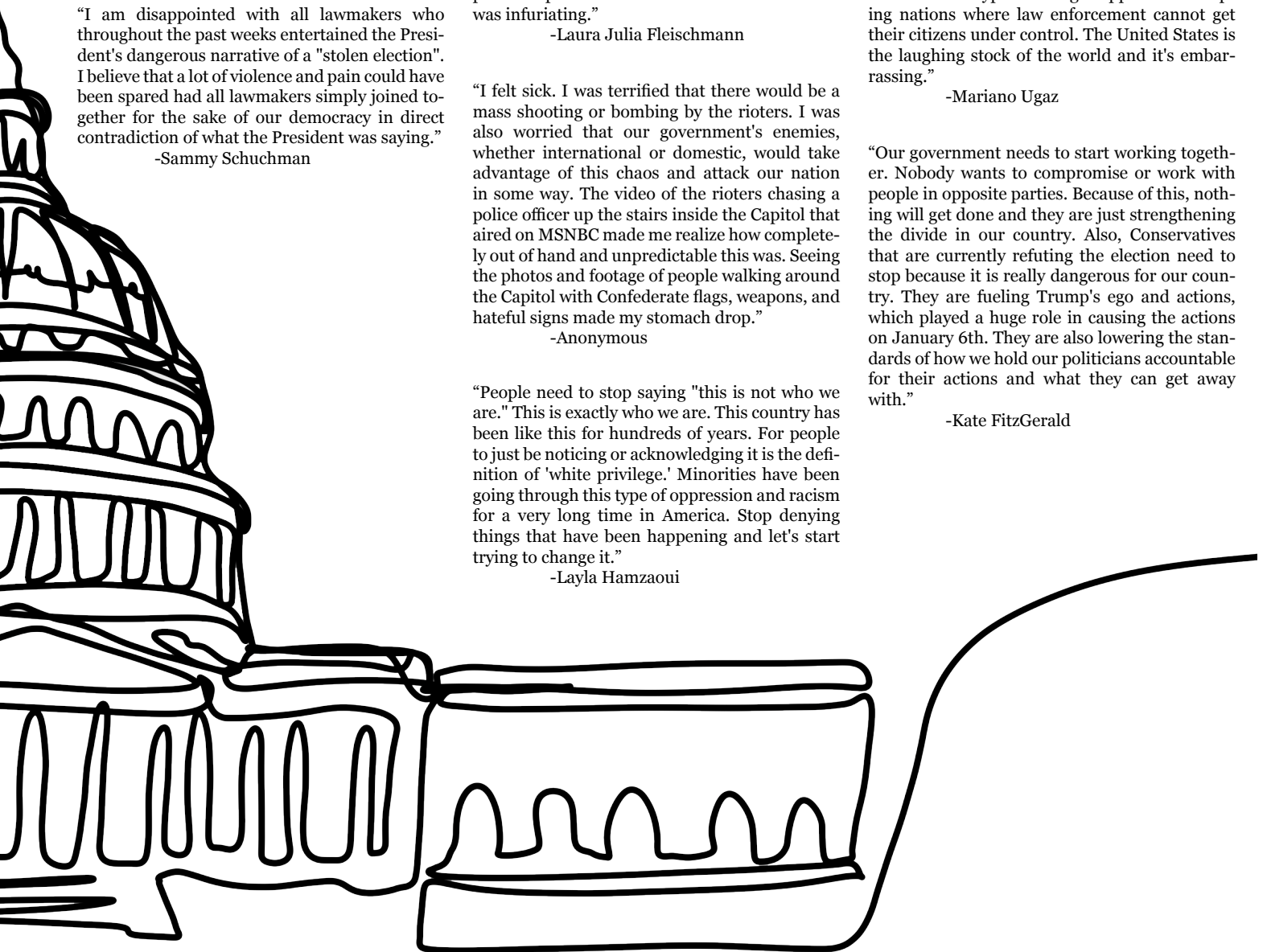
-Gabby Schmidt

"Quite simply, the fact that this country can elect a president that incites violence and riots that are a threat to democracy is disappointing. The most important factor here is not that the riots caused physical harm but rather harm to our image as a nation. The U.S. is supposed to be a role model of democracy for developing nations, yet we have chosen to elect a president who not only chooses to attack the democratic system with baseless claims, but also will not condemn an act of violence caused by his own supporters. It's ridiculous that a nation so rich, so powerful, and with so much education can lead to these types of people committing these absurdly illegal crimes. These types of things happen in developing nations where law enforcement cannot get their citizens under control. The United States is the laughing stock of the world and it's embarrassing."

-Mariano Ugaz

"Our government needs to start working together. Nobody wants to compromise or work with people in opposite parties. Because of this, nothing will get done and they are just strengthening the divide in our country. Also, Conservatives that are currently refuting the election need to stop because it is really dangerous for our country. They are fueling Trump's ego and actions, which played a huge role in causing the actions on January 6th. They are also lowering the standards of how we hold our politicians accountable for their actions and what they can get away with."

-Kate Fitzgerald



# The Status Quo is Broken



## The World of Standardized Testing is Crumbling

BY MAYA CYNKIN

For nearly the last 20 years, the United States has been obsessed with standardized testing. When President George W. Bush signed the K-12 No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, the belief that we could use testing to attain educational success and end the achievement gap was common. Barack Obama then later increased the stakes and significance of test scores under that same notion. Due to this philosophy, scores on the SAT and ACT became a very important factor in college admissions. College rankings were heavily based on test scores and became influential and prominent, as students relied on them to choose their school, and schools tried to improve their rankings with targeted reforms. Scholarship programs were linked to test scores as well, and some companies even checked the scores of potential employees. This, if nothing else, makes it clear how important standardized testing was.

Today, we are seeing the downfall of this consensus among major policymakers, who previously believed that testing was the key to holding students, schools, and teachers accountable and to a high standard. This idea is no longer believed in by many teachers and critics, as there is significant research showing that standardized test

scores are most strongly correlated to a student's life circumstances, giving some teens an advantage over others. It's not a shocking occurrence that all of this is happening during the coronavirus pandemic, which forced educational institutions to change how they operate; it is also allowing states to learn that they can live without testing.

It is not a guarantee that standardized testing will stop; that every state and district will cut back on it, or that all universities will stop requiring an SAT or ACT score to apply. However, increasing numbers of policymakers are starting to view testing from a different perspective. A senior at B-CC high school shared that she "would be extremely happy to see the standardized testing end because it isn't a good system to determine the abilities of students. It just has so much to do with the resources a student has access to and the level of education they've received. If one student can afford a tutor and another can't, they have a large disadvantage solely because of their economic status."

President-Elect, Joe Biden, has attempted to dissociate himself from the Obama administration's pro-testing policies and has recently mentioned that he does not agree with high-stakes

testing. Although he has not promised to work on reducing standardized testing as president, it could very well happen.

With exam days being canceled because of the COVID-19 crisis, many colleges have dropped the requirement for an ACT or SAT test score for admission this fall with the permission of the Department of Education. State leaders realized it wasn't reasonable or fair to give students the tests. However, one of the only downsides to this is the major organizations that own the standardized tests, ACT Inc. and the College Board, are greatly struggling.

A B-CC junior said, "I hope most colleges remain test-optional next year when I am applying. It's very difficult to prepare for the SAT with everything having to be online, plus I don't think standardized tests accurately reflect students."

The idea that standardized testing is a successful way of measuring students' accomplishments is being challenged now more strongly than ever before. The combination of the pandemic and the lasting disappointment in the testing industry creates a possible new future for public education.

# Are Apprenticeships the Answer?

## A Conversation With WSJ's Greg Ip

BY ELYAS LAUBACH

As of October 22, 2020, first-year college enrollment has dropped 13%, and undergraduate enrollment is down 4.4% compared to the fall of 2019, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. This massive drop in enrollment can largely be seen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic as college students are choosing not to spend upwards of \$30,000 just for online classes. However, a deeper look at the numbers reveals that there are also underlying, more long-term trends that back up this decrease in postsecondary education enrollment. Strada Education Network does annual surveys among college students; the share of students who say that higher education is worth its cost has gone from 77% in 2016 to just 56% in 2020.

Greg Ip has been the Chief Economics Commentator for the Wall Street Journal since 2015 and, prior to that, was the U.S. Economics Editor for *The Economist*. Ip recently wrote an article titled "The \$2 Trillion Question: How to Spend on Education for the Future," in which he examines the new path to investing in human capital, debunking the increasingly fictional concept that going to college automatically results in financial well-being. Ip has many eye-opening insights on the current economic situation in the United States, how it is connected to our higher education system, and how the flaws therein have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

One of the reasons college students feel that the education they are receiving is not worth the cost is that, although they finish college with a degree, they have no real hands-on experience or idea of what the jobs in their field are like. Internships and apprenticeships would give students crucial experience to figure out whether they want to enter a certain area of study and where they want to work in that field. Students would also gain valuable connections and a clearer path to a desirable job. Ip said, "College students who have internships as part of their education find it much easier to transition into a job, especially if the internship was specifically crafted with their career interests in mind." In "The \$2 Trillion Question," Ip also suggests that apprenticeships could not only supplement, but even replace four-year college programs. In addition, internships could be incorporated into the high school curriculum by having students spend half the day in the classroom and the other half working at a company that interests them. This system is already employed throughout much of Europe, and gives students a better idea of what field they want to work in, and whether they want to pursue higher education or join the workforce right away. Creating a system of hands-on training is a challenge, especially because government

involvement in the area has been a foreign idea to America. "Historically, the United States has felt that the training of employees ought to be the responsibility of the employer and not the government," Ip explains. This presents a new set of problems. "Compared to other countries, American workers tend to move around a lot... historically [it] has been rare for an American employee to spend his life with one employer... an employer didn't have the incentives to invest heavily in the training of employee because that employee might leave after a few years," Ip adds. Such a system can be created, as shown in Kentucky, where in 2010 Toyota, in conjunction with local community colleges, created a program called the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME). Apprentices in this program earned \$45,000 more after five years than similar students who did not do an apprenticeship. A government guided, more widespread apprenticeship system like FAME would make young people much more independent of academia and put "a lot of pressure on the colleges themselves to reconsider their business models," preventing them from "rais[ing] tuition as much as they want one year after the next," as Ip states.

COVID-19 will have lasting effects on the economy. Neither American society nor the economy will simply go back to the way they were pre-pandemic. Online services that have become popular out of necessity--like online shopping and streaming platforms--will largely remain quite popular after restrictions have been lifted and the population vaccinated. Ip gives another example: "a company like Carvana, which is mostly an online car seller, has proved to be very popular, whereas CarMax, which mostly sells cars out of stores has had to deal with the fact that a lot of people don't want to come to their stores...[This] suggests that there's a need to be training [more] people who can work on the algorithms and data manipulation and the video content that will be used in those types of businesses." This shift in demand, and future shifts as well, can be better answered by schools partnering with companies rather than working alone. Apprenticeship programs that will train students to satisfy the current demands of the economy would be more beneficial to students, schools, and local economies than having schools across the country drastically change their curricula every few years to meet the changes in society and the economy.

Over the past year, the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted core flaws in the United States' education system, while in the same breath illuminating solutions--like a large-scale, government-supported system of internship and apprenticeship opportunities that would lead to higher, better targeted human capital and economic productivity.

### More Questions and Answers with Greg Ip

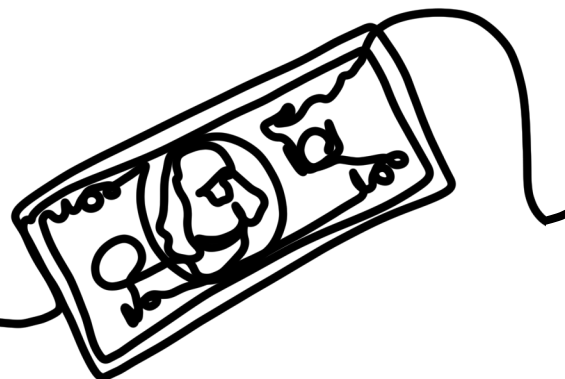
**Q:** Would you say that the emphasis on STEM has kind of fallen into a mistaken idea of what well being actually is?

**Greg Ip:** Somebody who's trying to pursue artistic or philoso-

hical greatness or revelation probably shouldn't be taking a STEM program. But again, going back to my point that if what we're trying to do is achieve and improve people's economic well being...[and] this isn't a reason that if you really don't want to be an engineer to go ahead and do engineering anyway just because it's going to earn you a good income...I think the data, at least that I look at, is fairly conclusive that STEM fields offer one of the best returns on the dollars and the hours that you spend in higher education.

**Q:** To some extent, we already tie personhood to economic human capital in our culture. Is [a more human capital based educational/economic] system going to further marginalize poets and people that operate in the humanities?

**Ip:** I think that we should have a society where everybody has the capacity to pursue dignity and a decent standard of living no matter what you choose as your career. But...I do still believe that we need to focus a lot on the economic needs and purposes of education and skills...There's a debate going on right now about whether we should give everybody a \$2,000 check to help with the economy. I'm against that. The reason I'm against that is we know that 90% of the people in the labor force already have jobs. They're getting paychecks, okay? They're not in dire need of \$2,000...Moreover, the price tag is more than \$400 billion a year. Now with interest rates so low, we can afford it. But one day maybe we may want that \$400 billion dollars for something else: to deal with climate change, to support the military, maybe there's going to be another bad phase of this pandemic and we'll need to pay more unemployment insurance...So we need to make difficult choices now.



# From Crisis to Opportunity: A Conversation with Former Education Secretary Arne Duncan

BY HANNAH GANDAL

As the United States Secretary of Education under the Obama administration, Arne Duncan, has spent his career advocating for improving the quality of education to level the playing field for less fortunate students. He focused his seven years in office fighting to give all children access to an education that will set them up for success in the future. In an interview with Duncan, he reflected on his time leading the nation's education system and shared his thoughts on where we need to go next as a country to position students for success.

During his time as secretary, Duncan was credited with numerous accomplishments, with a few standing out for him. "I was proud to get high school graduation rates up to an all time high, and that was for every subgroup of kids." He stressed the importance of having high expectations for all students and getting serious about closing achievement gaps. Duncan added that one of his greatest successes was investing earlier in students' development by "putting more than a billion dollars behind early childhood education." Despite these accomplishments, there are

still more things Duncan wishes he could have done, like "college financial aid for dreamers." A "Dreamer" refers to an underage immigrant who is protected under the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Duncan also desperately wished that his department could have gotten more done in terms of ending gun violence, especially after the Sandy Hook massacre. He hopes that gun control and early childhood education will be a priority for the Biden administration.

This year has been very difficult for schools and students across the country, and Duncan expressed sadness and frustration over the situation. "I hate that we are here, and I truly believe that we didn't have to be here," he explained. "For me, this is a natural disaster that morphed into a man-made catastrophe." Because of this catastrophe, most students have had to adapt to fully virtual schooling, which has created significant challenges. "All of us, including high schoolers, are naturally social beings," and high school students, especially, want to connect, engage, and be around people. He hopes that we can soon engage in more extracurriculars and other activi-

ties to be around each other until it is safe enough to go back into the classroom. In regards to any lasting impacts of online schooling, "there will probably be things that just stay online, and that might vary community by community," Duncan explained. "There is an honest question, should everything go back to the way it was?"

Secretary Duncan expressed a huge concern with opportunity gaps between fortunate and less fortunate students widening due to the pandemic, especially in terms of education. "Any time that there is a crisis or upheaval, the most marginalized, vulnerable, and disenfranchised always get hit first," said Duncan. "They get hit the hardest, and their pain lasts the longest." There are three million students who have not been back to any form of school since last March, and Duncan knows that schools need to find these students and help them reconnect and catch up. He mentioned that these students' social-emotional, food, and academic needs must be worked on child by child.







Duncan is known for his big ideas and unapologetic drive for change. He was eager to discuss innovations schools should be considering to use the crisis to jump further ahead in the future, but he acknowledged that it is difficult for most to think of the bigger picture when the country is in crisis mode. Despite this reality, he feels strongly that “the goal should not be to go back to normal.” He explained, “I’d love to see us move to a pre-K through 14 system so that everyone has access to pre-K as well as at least community college.” The current K-12 system gives all children access to primary and secondary education for free. This will be inadequate in the future, therefore a pre-K through 14 system should be put into place for all students. This will guarantee that all children enroll in pre-K before primary school as well as two years at some form of college after graduation. “A high school diploma is necessary and important, but it’s insufficient.” To Duncan, every high school graduate needs to have a plan to continue their education, and every high school should be guiding and helping each student with that plan even after they leave. Continuing on to any form of college is critical in today’s economy. “That should become the new norm, not the exception,” he said.

Duncan also said that he wants everyone to think very differently about how schools measure and value learning as well. “What has been constant is time, and the variable has been learning. I want to flip those two,” he explained. “I want the variable to be time, and the constant to be

kids learning.” Every student is different, and some may need more time for learning than others. Some students may need longer school days or schooling on the weekends for them to gain knowledge successfully. “We have to stop acting like everyone needs the same amount of everything, and try to meet their individual needs.”

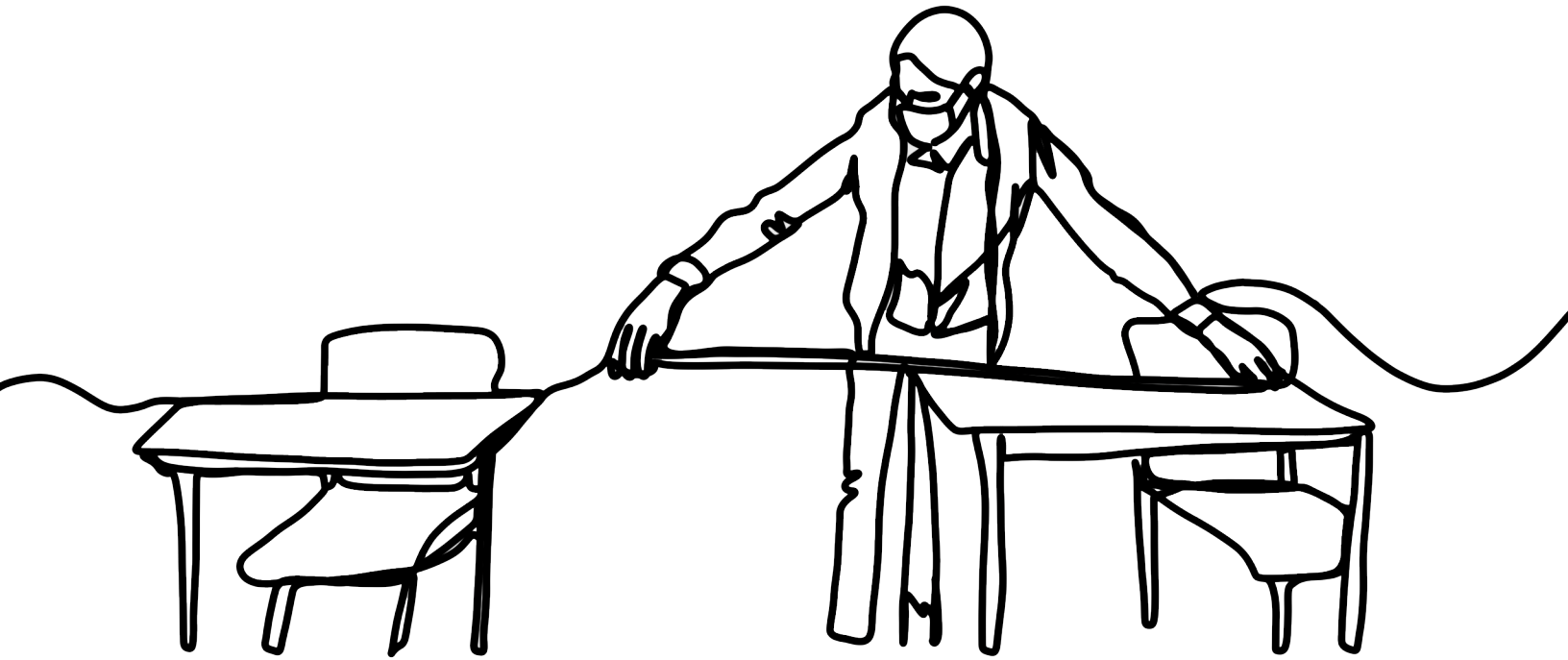
Earlier in Duncan’s term, he advocated for year-round schooling as a way to increase learning, especially for disadvantaged students. “We need to reinvent. We need to reimagine what education looks like,” he said in an interview with Yahoo Finance. “Why do we have summers off? It makes no sense,” believing that a two to three-month break from school causes many students to fall behind. “The school calendar is based on the agrarian economy, and not too many kids are working in the fields these days,” added Duncan. His main goal of closing opportunity gaps and fighting for equity in education calls for reforming the school calendar to give students the time that they deserve in the classroom. The calendar should be based on student needs, not the economy. He stated that he doesn’t know how realistic this idea is, as it would call for a major increase in budgets, but that it should be a recommended option for students who may need additional time in the classroom. “Students need different dosages of school”, he explained, “and it’s not just academic, it may just be a safe place for students to go.”

For many students, it has been hard to cope with the pandemic and as well as being success-

fully engaged in school while looking through a zoom camera all day. Some students are finding it particularly challenging and are disengaging from school altogether. Duncan’s advice for students is to “be looking out for their peers who are struggling.” He worries about isolation and how it is affecting teens’ mental health, but also the obvious safety issues that the country is facing. “Historically, mental health has been stigmatized,” he said. Having more open and honest conversations with peers regarding mental health is necessary at this moment in time. The large number of students who have checked out and are starting to view school as optional is also something that has been concerning to Duncan. “I get the degree of difficulty,” he explained, referring to the situation students face with on-line learning, “but there are a lot of things that we have to do in life that isn’t that fun.” There is an importance in building resiliency, something students and adults alike are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

Though this year has been very tough for everyone, especially students, Duncan is optimistic that we can come back from this whole situation stronger. His hopes are resting on the younger generation to lead the way. “For the students that can work through this, show empathy for each other, understand the importance of democracy, and understand the importance of science,” he explained, “I hope that you guys can lead the country to a better place.”

# What We Can Learn From Others



## Return Policies: How Schools Have Made It Work

BY NIKKI MIRALA

After the initial nationwide shutdown due to COVID-19, one of the greatest concerns was how to get students back into the classrooms. Many schools have taken the risk to reopen and are able to use this time to test various ways that ensure their students receive a quality education while not compromising their safety during a pandemic that has no end in sight.

The most common implementations have been to initiate a school-wide mask mandate, place desks six-feet apart, and encourage social distancing. These changes have been evident in school districts in Texas, Florida, Iowa, and Ar-

kansas which were most determined to reopen.

Schools have also tried to keep the number of students in each classroom small, but this is difficult depending on the size of each school and number of teachers available.

Some have also introduced the idea of half of the students attending class in-person while others attend the same class through the platform Zoom. Schools that have since implemented this have said that this way, all students can be engaged in learning while ensuring their personal safety. This introduces another idea of 'hybrid schedules' where students attend class in-person some days and then stay home and participate in

virtual learning on others days. This allows time for the custodial staff at each school to disinfect the classrooms to further ensure safety and cleanliness.

There is an extreme amount of uncertainty when it comes to the coronavirus, let alone trying to receive an education in the midst of it. Each school district is figuring out what will work best for their students during this time, but nothing is permanent.

While these implementations may come and go, some may be breakthroughs for education and prove to be extremely beneficial for years to come regardless of the state of the virus.

# Private School's Hybrid Plans: A Good Outline for MCPS Reopening Plans?

BY MAURA RYAN AND COURTNEY WILKS

Walking the halls and smiling at friends, sitting on the lawn for lunch, and being in a real classroom are all things that have been taken away with the move to online school. For many students, teachers, and families across the nation, returning to school has been a topic of much debate. Here in Montgomery County, it became obvious that students would not be going back to school in the fall as cases rose in late summer. In August, Montgomery County Public Schools released a few possible plans that involved hybrid learning. However, after much deliberation and waiting, it was announced on August 6th that school would be completely virtual until at least January 2021. A shock wave was sent throughout the county, but acceptance of the virtual plans followed. A few days after MCPS announced their virtual plans, Governor Larry Hogan announced that it in fact would be safe for all Maryland public schools to reopen. MCPS ignored this, as they had already put a virtual plan in place, and wanted to decrease the number of cases in the county as best as possible.

Students are in roughly 6 person classes, with peers at home joining into the class live.

At St. John's College High School, there was a rotating cohort system of 3 groups: A, B, and C. Group A returns to school Monday and Tuesday, Group B returns Thursday and Friday, and Group C returns the following Monday and Tuesday, and so on. Every student is virtual on Wednesdays. "Although it's nice to be in person, I'm not with many friends in my cohort," said Nick Ryan, a junior at St. John's. Since the cohorts were categorized alphabetically, Nick, along with the other students, weren't able to choose who they were grouped with. In compliance with health and safety protocols, face coverings, social distancing, etc. were required. Furthermore, students ate lunch at their own desks in the cafeteria with plexiglass on all 3 sides of them, inhibiting normal conversation. "[We have] to yell to our friends to have any sort of conversation," said Nick. Unfortunately, he only returned for 4 days of school until an outbreak occurred after a large Halloween party which shutdown the school.

dents have become increasingly uncomfortable as the school was required to keep the windows open for air circulation, and students had to sit outside for lunch, which is now not the case. Although she enjoyed the hybrid environment learning at first, the cold days and less inviting atmosphere have made her want to stay home and continue solely virtual learning.

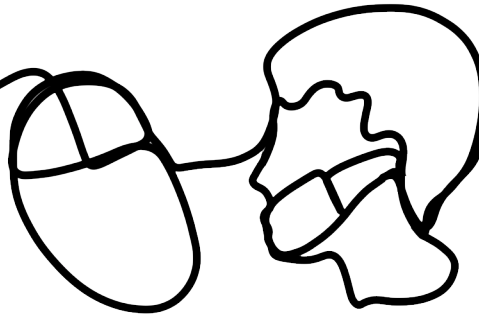
Returning October 5, the Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart implemented a plan in which the school is divided into two groups, blue and gold teams which were pre-existing to the pandemic, rotating weekly. Stone Ridge uses a contact tracing/symptom tracker app called Magnus in order to ensure the safety of the student body. Students must update the app before coming to school marking any symptoms they may have had. If a student found out they had tested positive, they and their entire class were required to quarantine for two weeks. Senior Randolph Kaminskas stated that there are 150-200 high schoolers in person at a time and desks are spaced 6 feet apart.

Some private schools in the DMV announced similar plans to those of MCPS for online learning. On the other hand, many private schools returned to in person/hybrid learning in the fall. Their health and safety implementations exemplify new and effective ideas of how MCPS could return to a hybrid of in-person and virtual school.

Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School began hybrid learning on October 6, using a plan that separated the student body into 3 groups alphabetically. Senior at Visitation Fiona Schulz stated that each group is at school for one week at a time and when they finish their in-person week, they participate in school virtually the following two weeks. This means roughly 120 people are on campus at one time, with classes ranging in size from 2-10 people. Masks are required for the full school day, and desks are arranged to enforce social distancing.

The Connelly School of the Holy Child returned around the same time. Similar to Georgetown Visitation, Holy Child's students returned in alphabetical cohorts, however, there were 2 groups instead of 3. These groups started off attending school in alternating two week periods, rotating every other Monday. "The rotation was changed to every week because people did not like being online for two weeks at a time," said sophomore Maria Terminiello.

Students are tested every Thursday before returning to school to confirm all students are negative. Terminiello stated that because of frequent testing, no one has tested positive yet, but one student got a false positive, resulting in the entire freshman class having to stay home from school.



The Academy of the Holy Cross has been trying their best to remain COVID free. They used the same cohort system rotation as St. John's, continuously tested students the Thursday before returning to school, and had a number of safety measurements put into place. "There are one way hallways, one way staircases, color coded hallways for dismissals, designated entrances and exits for each grade, designated outdoor courtyards for lunch for each grade," said Mackenzie Peacock, a senior at Holy Cross. They had done a lot to ensure their student's safety, including adding teachers in the hallways to check that students were following the traffic rules, and that only one person was in the bathroom at all times. "Students can opt to be virtual if [they] don't feel comfortable participating in hybrid learning and are asked to stay home if possible exposure has been risked," said Mackenzie.

Health and safety were at the forefront of the school's implementations, but it came with a compromise to students' comfort, and the downside of losing certain senior privileges. "Seniors usually have their own staircase that no one else can use, their own stage that we eat lunch on that no one else can go on, and seniors get the speaker privileges at lunch of controlling the aux for the whole school," Mackenzie said. Unfortunately, as the winter months approached, some protocols were changed due to the colder weather. Stu-

With so many private schools going hybrid, students in MCPS have also expressed interest in the potential reality of learning both virtually and in-person. On November 6, 2020, MCPS announced more information regarding reopening. A series of requirements that would be necessary in order for students to safely return to school regarding personal protective equipment, air quality and social distancing was published in this announcement. Also, within this new plan was the creation of "cohorts," the groups that private schools have also created, consisting of different groups of people returning to school in 3 waves. On November 10th, these cohorts were slightly changed. They are structured by the following: in mid-January, special education and faculty would be phased in, and by February 1st, the first wave of other students would begin. This first wave includes Kindergarten/Grade 1 and Grade 6, the second includes Pre-K, Grades 2-3, Grade 7, and Grades 11-12 and the third includes Grades 4-5 and Grades 8-10. Just 4 days after releasing their reopening plan, MCPS had already received over 500 responses on their parent/guardian survey. In these responses, there was an overwhelming urge for younger kids, as well as seniors, to be prioritized in the phases. Although this reopening plan may work, MCPS has many students to look out for--unlike private schools which usually have much smaller classes for each grade level. Nonetheless, private schools seem to have implemented hybrid systems that truly work, and MCPS could look to them for tips on how to make their hybrid plan in the late winter as safe as possible.

# Lessons from Europe



BY LANG HANLEY

While the pandemic remains an issue, educational responses to return to in-person learning have differed greatly from continent to continent. Just as in the United States, schools across Europe were forced to shut down in March when the virus first hit. Unlike here in the States, many nations actually returned to in-person schooling to finish off school in April and May -- 22 nations returned to some sort of in-person schooling. Strict protocols were put in place which resulted in largely encouraging results with not many students contracting the virus. In a video conference, education ministers from across the European Union told parents and staff that the reopening of schools had not led to any major increase in COVID-19 infections among children. However, with such a small sample size and standout, questions couldn't be fully answered as to how dealing with the virus would go in the following school year.

That was months ago, so how has Europe dealt with returning to in-person schooling this academic year? Amid a recent spike in COVID-19 cases across Europe, with as many 1.8 million new cases in just a matter of 7 days leading up to November 5th (The Brussels Times), the idea of in-person schooling must be reassessed. However, despite these rising numbers, the director of the European branch of the World Health Organization has said that schools should "remain open until the end," and that there's "no reason to say that schools are one of the main vectors of transmission." He also said that "we cannot afford a lost generation due to COVID-19."

So how closely have the actions of nations across Europe followed these words from such a prominent figure? With no universal policy, numerous routes have been taken to deal with this second wave of infection. The majority of countries that opened up schools at the beginning of the school year have remained open despite the

reentered lockdowns. For example, France, Germany, Ireland, and numerous other countries have all entered tight lockdowns while keeping schools open. The leaders of these nations have delivered similar messages. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that locking down will help make sure "that our children are not the losers of the pandemic," and French Prime Minister Jean Castex stated that "national education must continue to function." Similar to the original lockdowns we saw when the pandemic hit, non-essential business will have to close, take out will be the only way of getting a restaurant meal, and only a few key actions will be permitted as reasons to leave the house. Despite these strong restrictions and numerous teachers' unions speaking out, such as the National Education Union in the United Kingdom, calling school an "engine" for the virus' spread, leaders at the top such as Prime Minister Boris Johnson have remained staunch with their viewpoints.

Spain is another example of these European countries attempting to keep schools open amid the pandemic. Laura Sandomingo, a high school student in Spain said that the restrictions in the country have become hard to follow because they change so often in each region, similar to a state in the U.S. In her region, you cannot leave your county without justification. There are also nationwide curfews which are region-dependent. In her region, everyone must be home by 11 p.m.

She has been attending in-person school since September. At her school, protocols have been put in place to keep everyone safe, each desk is 3 feet apart, students are required to wear masks at all times, and they no longer move to different rooms for their classes. However, despite these protocols, Sandomingo admits that school life isn't perfect. For example, each grade has its own lunch where students are required to sit 3 feet apart but students can sit with whoever they want, which she describes as "kind of a mess."

Their break period has also become an issue as each class was given designated areas to be in, but the groups have been mixing together. If someone tests positive, students in that class will have to quarantine.

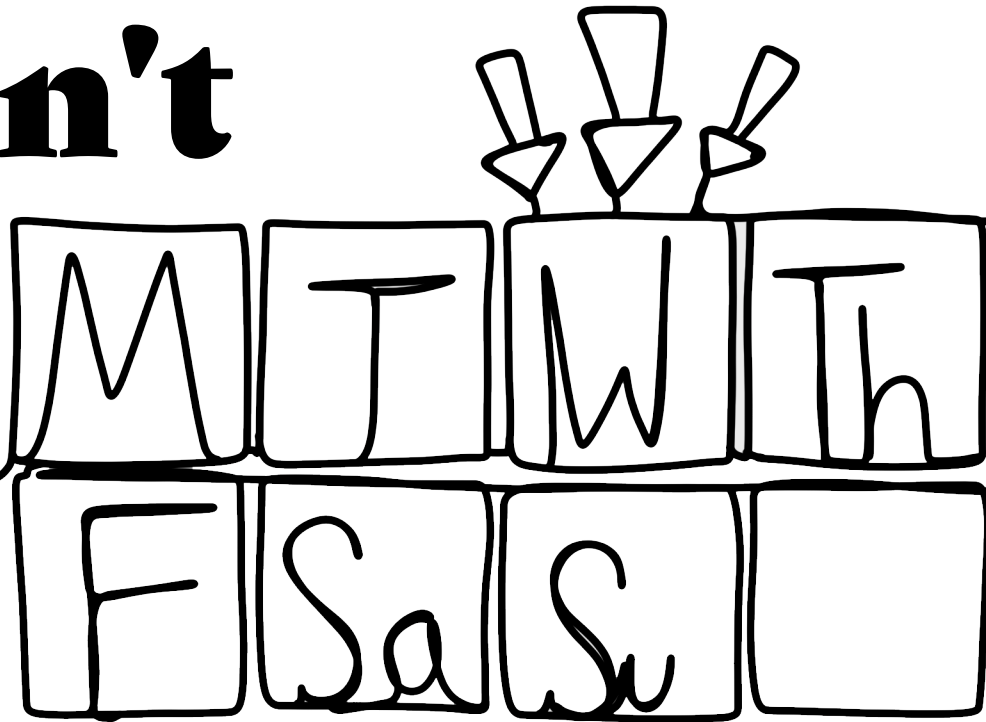
Given that school has remained in-person, Sandomingo says she hasn't really been affected academically due to the pandemic. But on a more personal note, she says, "I've been less motivated with life, in general, because I work really hard in school and the thing was you would work really hard in the week and then at the weekend you would go out with your friends and have some fun. But now we have a curfew and nightclubs are closed, so we can't really do much." She admits that the repetitiveness and isolation of the pandemic "get to your head a little."

So how do teens in Spain perceive the virus, and to what extent are they following protocols? Sandomingo says that teens haven't taken it seriously which she credits to how social people are in Spain. She said, "We're all super social, we're extroverted, so when you tell us 'you have essentially no social life', people are going to find another way to socialize." Strangely, she says most teens do follow the 11 p.m. curfew in her region yet don't follow many of the other rules, such as those barring gatherings of more than 6 people. In addition, she says house parties have become increasingly common, since the nightclubs were forced to close.

Many nations across Europe are in the midst of an infectious wave, similar to when we first met the virus, but are working to keep schools open. It will be interesting to see how the United States deals with what's projected to be a heavy wave of infection in the winter and how similar our path will be. The actions taken by European institutions could set an example for other countries such as the U.S. However, only time will tell.



# What Worked and What Didn't



## MCPS Experiments in Remote Learning: Independent Wednesdays

BY KADIJAH BAH AND GRAYSON O'MARRA

2020 has been a crazy year. Among many other things, it has brought us a totally new format of education in Montgomery County. Since September, Montgomery County Public Schools have been entirely online and adjusted their schedules to accommodate this. In our new virtual learning model, MCPS has scheduled (most) Wednesdays as voluntary teacher check-in days, meaning that there are no mandatory classes on these days. Students can wake up a little later than usual and catch up on all of their work, or go to check-ins and get any extra help they may need with class material or assignments. Even though Montgomery County Public Schools have these independent work days scheduled now, this change might not be permanent, despite the fact that these independent Wednesdays benefit and motivate students to do all their assignments.

The adjustment from middle to high school is

difficult, especially when it comes to workload. Many students transition from taking regular and honors classes to taking AP and IB level courses. On average, high schoolers report having three to four hours of homework per day, and when you factor in work, college applications, after school clubs, and sports, many students are left with no free time at all. With this big workload comes a lack of motivation for many students.

Not having classes on Wednesdays can be extremely helpful. Students have a little bit more time to sleep in and get proper rest. Students can also use this time to review what they have gone over in class so that they are actually comprehending the learning material. Additionally, if they ever need help from a teacher, they can simply log on to their check-in Zoom and ask questions. Instead of feeling bombarded by work on Wednesdays, students feel organized and refreshed. Having a day to be able to focus on

working and studying can also increase students' motivation to get their work done early rather than to wait to do it at the last minute. This day off can also be used to run errands such as going to doctor appointments, music lessons, therapy sessions, and doing any necessary shopping. This way, students don't have to miss instruction time to do these errands. Overall, having Wednesdays off can improve everyone's ability to learn and increase their productivity.

MCPS should reconsider their in-person schooling model of having mandatory classes occurring every single weekday. When we return to in-person schooling, having a day off to check in with teachers and catch up on work could really benefit all students. We have seen that it's feasible for teachers to still get their lessons done with a day off, and it doesn't seem to be harming student's learning abilities. In fact, it seems to be helping.

# Keep A and B Days

BY KARENNA BARMADA

Six minutes. Ask your teacher or classmate that question, grab your books, finagle your way out the door, try to get through the hallways (or up the stairs) without losing something or tripping on your shoelace, only to finally sit down and have to repeat the whole thing 45 minutes later. It's exhausting. And that's just getting to and from class.

"We only have 45 minutes to cover this... I wish we could spend longer on it... Watch this video/visit this site to teach yourself..." This overall disconnect is not what school is supposed to be. Instead of exploring, practicing, and comprehending content, we are asked to listen, read, rush, and regurgitate as fast as we can. All of that just so the students coming in 45 minutes behind us can do the same thing. But it doesn't have to be this way. Block schedules allow longer class periods that enable more engaging activities and give students a chance to reflect on what they're learning, while also allowing teachers to create more personalized instruction.

Ideally, our return to the hallowed B-CC hallways will include 75-90 minute classes. While the 60 minute classes we have now are preferable

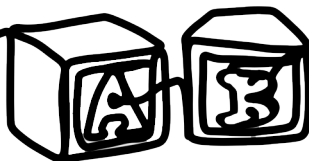
to the 45 minutes of chaos we had pre-COVID, 60 minutes does not provide the time cushion needed to have more varied, in-depth, and impressionable instruction. 75-90 minutes would support more labs in science classes, deeper and more robust discussions in English and history classes, and additional instruction and practice time in math classes. Even without COVID, it's hard to meet new people in 45 minute periods. There's not as much time for collaboration, and when there are discussions between students, they are brief. Block schedules would allow students to make connections with their classmates and not feel so isolated.

Our brains can process information within 13 milliseconds, but that does not mean that we understand or retain the information. For many students, it is difficult to move on to 3rd period when they're struggling to comprehend the material they just covered in 2nd period. This lack of clarity can lead to anxiety and distraction, and hinder concentration in other classes. A study by the National Education Association found that students in schools following block schedules retain information longer. They are given more time to process and truly understand informa-

tion, breaking up the monotony of the day so it is easier to stay interested and retain information.

Students aren't the only ones who suffer at the hands of our current schedule. Under the 45-minute time constraint, teachers are limited in their ability to individualize learning and provide targeted follow-up. They also have to manage hundreds of unique students a day, both in and out of class, like answering emails that require a quick turn-around since they will see students the next day. A block schedule will give teachers the breathing room they want to develop, not only more targeted, relevant and engrossing lessons, but also to form stronger relationships with their students.

High school is intended to provide students with the skills necessary for entering college or the workforce. What skills are we getting from our current model other than how speedwalk and stomach an unhealthy amount of caffeine? Implementing a block schedule at B-CC would create a healthier community inside and outside of the classroom. And don't get me started on the amount of homework that comes with 7 classes every day.



## Stop the Block!

BY SAMMY SCHUCHMAN

As students and teachers alike have begun to prepare to reemerge from the confines of our homes and reenter the classroom, some have begun to hint that the block schedule we've been using during virtual school is something they want to permanently transition to after the pandemic ends. While this may seem like an intriguing idea, there are a few reasons why, in the end, the change would be for the worse.

For all who aren't familiar with the intricacies of academic scheduling, the idea of a block schedule is that the student attends only a handful of classes, which they spend a great amount of time on each day. Then, when it's the next day, the student attends their remaining classes, also in sizeable chunks of time for each class.

This contrasts strongly with the traditional schooling model, where students have an equal amount of time for all of their classes each day.

In theory, elongated classes help to provide teachers with "unique and creative learning opportunities." Speaking from experience, the only unique opportunity I've experienced in a block schedule is the constant battle to fight the overwhelming urge to close your eyes as the teacher approaches the second hour of their lecture.

It's important to remember that the block schedule was intended for college students, who like adults, have significantly more gray matter in

their brain than teenagers, allowing them to focus for longer periods of time. For kids that were struggling to stay concentrated for 45 minutes in the traditional seven period schedule, how will they fare when that time gets doubled?

Not to mention the small but essential breaks between classes that would disappear under a block schedule. These are critical, as they serve as a reset for students in between classes. Studies such as Dough Rohrer's Educational Psychology Review back up the fact that even the very act of experiencing multiple different subjects in one day has certain intrinsic value. They conclude that the students are able to form connections between the subjects, and over time develop a more complete understanding of all material.

Changing gears, let's talk about absences. Unfortunately, many high school students have experienced the intense anxiety that comes with the boatloads of missed classwork they have to make up when they get back from being sick, or a vacation. Now try to imagine that stress and double it. Yes, double it. You see, under a block schedule, because you attend essentially two day's worth of classes in one period, missing a day means you have to make up two day's worth of work for those classes.

Similarly, because you only attend each class once every other day, all sense of continuity from class to class is lost. It's illogical to assume that

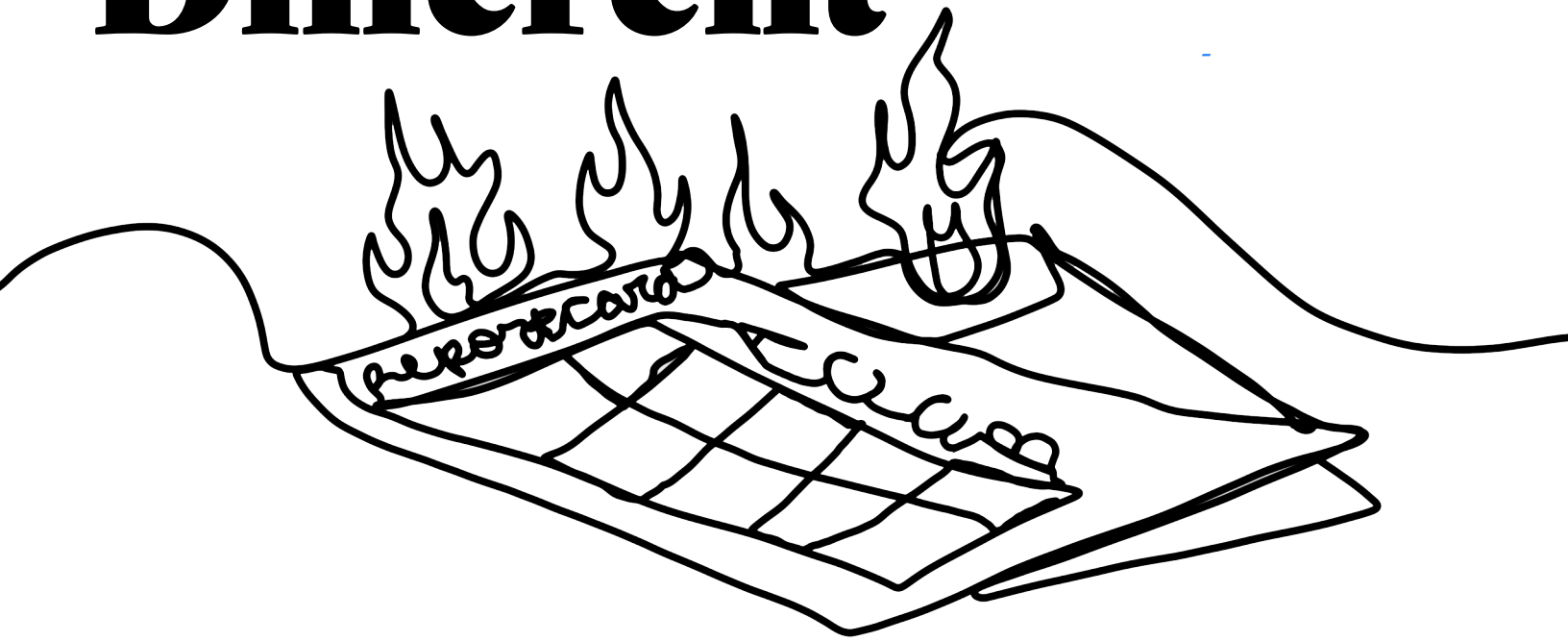
both students and teachers will simply be able to continue right where they left off, with one day removed. Rather, time that should be devoted to new learning will be spent on warming up and trying to recollect what had been learned earlier.

Lastly, one would assume that a massive overhaul of the education system would have evidence that it yields academic results that are at least as proficient as the current system. This is not the case here. In fact, the opposite has been empirically proven time after time.

Gordon Gore from Drexel University published a study that comprehensively analyzed the likelihood of students in the 12th grade to get an A on the final exam. Students who attended traditionally scheduled classes had an average 8.2% chance of scoring an A. This number plummeted for students taking the same course, but learning through a block schedule, with only a measly 3.9% chance of achieving the same grade.

It's important for all of us to remember that what might work for virtual school does not automatically translate to normal school. And while the decreased homework load that often accompanies the block schedule is quite enticing, it is of utmost importance that we prioritize what's truly the best fit for the students. Changing things simply for the sake of change is never a good idea, and while our current system is by no means perfect, the block schedule is not the answer.

# Something Completely Different



## The Possibility of a New Grading System

BY RACHEL LONKER

"I wouldn't be surprised if B-CC starts to transition towards a different grading system," said senior Delia Vanderzon. This concept is already being put into practice at many schools. On October 13th, members of a school board meeting in San Diego Unified School District unanimously voted to revise the district's grading practices.

The San Diego Unified School District has decided to grade students solely based on their understanding of a subject. They are also offering more options for second chances. School Board President John Lee Evans said, "we've been for too long on this idea where you had a chance, you didn't succeed, so therefore we're gonna categorize you as a failure, and your option is to start all over."

Under the new grading policy, work habits such as turning work in late will not affect students' academic grades. Instead, this will impact a separate citizenship grade that is based on their behavior. Students will also be granted multiple

chances to improve grades by correcting their work, and if caught cheating, they will be given an opportunity to reflect on their actions and take measures to rectify them. A parent of San Diego Unified children, Amy Wood, said, "the idea that you can make a mistake and go back and fix it is powerful and allows kids to learn and grow in a more reparative and less punitive environment."

This new system would more accurately reflect student abilities and could potentially address the racial disparities within current grading practices. According to data from San Diego, white students received D or F grades 7% of the time, an extremely rare amount especially when compared to Hispanic students, who receive D or F grades 23% of the time and Black students who receive such grades 20% of the time.

"At previous discussions with educators and administrators, we have consistently heard that black and brown students receive more referrals and their behavior is questioned more often than their white peers... In a school where most edu-

cators are white, this grading system is a more fair and equitable way of evaluating students' academic performance," said co-founder of Youth for Equity, junior Neha Kohli.

B-CC already has some policies in place that demonstrate a forgiveness similar to San Diego. For instance, many teachers offer quiz retakes, opportunities to drop the lowest grade, and ways to gain back points on previous assignments.

Second chances are particularly important during online learning. Freshman Charlie Raibman said, "it's difficult to get feedback on grades because teachers rarely leave comments on assignments." Junior Gabby Block echoed this statement, saying that "simply receiving letter grades is not always helpful or representative of the work I've put in."

Delia Vanderzon said, "recently, there has been a heightened awareness of racism and systemic problems at B-CC and our greater community. While I'm not exactly sure how, I think it's plausible that major change will come soon."

# What Grade Would You Give the American Grading System?

## Passing

BY KIERAN FITZGERALD

Whenever a marking period nears its end, students all over Montgomery County are working hard to receive the best grades that they can. Fortunately, even for those that are struggling, the new quarter brings an entirely clean slate. This is only part of the beauty of the current grading system.

The current Montgomery County grading format is a very beneficial system for students and implements a perfect ratio of homework to in-class assignments and essays, and presentations.

## Unsatisfactory

BY MICAH SCHUCHMAN

In the good old days (of kindergarten), students lived in a world where letters only served as lyrics in the alphabet song and pieces of the puzzles comprised of words and sentences. Concurrently, numbers were rungs in the infinitely long ladder of counting possibilities. Ten years later, for these same students, the exact same characters are symbols of their educational worth. Consequently, while the difference between an 89.42% and an 89.50% seems to be minute, it is this difference, the difference of a letter grade, that separates the emotions of frustration and elation. It is foolish that this system of static symbols, created all the way back in 1897, is still around today.

To be clear, the concept of grading itself is definitely not foolish; without grades, students would be left with little incentive to perform well in school, as there would be no way for outsiders to differentiate between students. The catch is that the current scale of six or seven letters of the alphabet reflecting 100 percentage points is not adequate for outsiders to make judgements off of. However, reform of the grading system will

MCPS weights their grades by putting homework in a 10% category, and all tasks/assessments in the 90% category towards your final grade for the semester. Aside from making it very easy for students to know what assignments are worth more than others, it makes students more well-rounded as they move forward in their academic career.

Another upside of the student-friendly MCPS grading system is that final semester grades can be based on the higher letter grade of two marking periods. For example, if a student were to receive a C in the first quarter, and then managed

to get a B in the second quarter, their grade for the semester would be a B. That B would be on the students final high school transcript that they would submit to colleges. Furthermore, MCPS makes it very easy for students and colleges to collaborate with one another. With the grading system as is, transcripts are very clear, and easy to understand. This allows colleges to efficiently compare students. Overall, the current grading system is very favorable to students, and there is not much concrete evidence to support removing it.

make for a much more accurate representation of students.

Standards-based grading (SBG) is a growing teaching movement amongst educators who want to toss the classic gradebook. According to TeacherEase (a software developer for SBG), in SBG, larger subjects, like math, are broken down into subtopics, known as learning targets, which students are expected to meet throughout the course. Grades are not measured according to proficiency in the larger topic as a whole, but the individual smaller topics. Rubrics clearly define the metrics needed to achieve each level of the learning target. Unlike the SBG system, in a letter grade system there is no set pathway to each letter, no guarantee of a certain position.

Within each equally-weighted learning target, there are usually four, but occasionally five, performance levels (marked in a numbered scale of 1-4 or 1-5), ranging from mastery of the topic to little or no mastery even when given feedback. For every subtopic, at the beginning of the marking period, every student starts at the "1 level", and strives to move up to the "4 level" by the end of the marking period (as determined by the

teacher). In contrast to the letter grade system, final grades will have much more meaning to a student. Instead of seeing an un-descriptive letter corresponding to a large subject, an SBG grading report includes subtopic descriptions along with the earned mastery number, students will be able to assess why they received a certain grade, what topics they've shown proficiency in, and what still needs work.

Some might argue that with the SBG system, it's hard to evaluate students. This is false, because like a letter grade system, grades can be converted into percentages. One can divide the points a student has earned by the amount of points available, to simply determine a students percentage, which allows outsiders (colleges) to compare students.

Another benefit to this grading system is the conversations that stem from it. Instead of having conversations with teachers about how to bring their grade up, students have conversations about how to master a topic. After all, when it's all said and done, education should be about learning, not achieving.

## Failing

BY JACK DOYLE

As of right now, students all over the U.S. are judged, evaluated, and categorized by the letters A, B, C, D, and either E or F. This has been the method used by the American educational system for centuries. Although these letters provide information on how well a student does their work, they provide no information on a student's strengths or weaknesses. Basically, this system pins a number on a student that can restrict them from future academic success. If a student receives an unfavorable letter grade, many colleges see it and instantly deny that student. This can falsely represent a student and affect their success in life. Letter grades misrepresent students

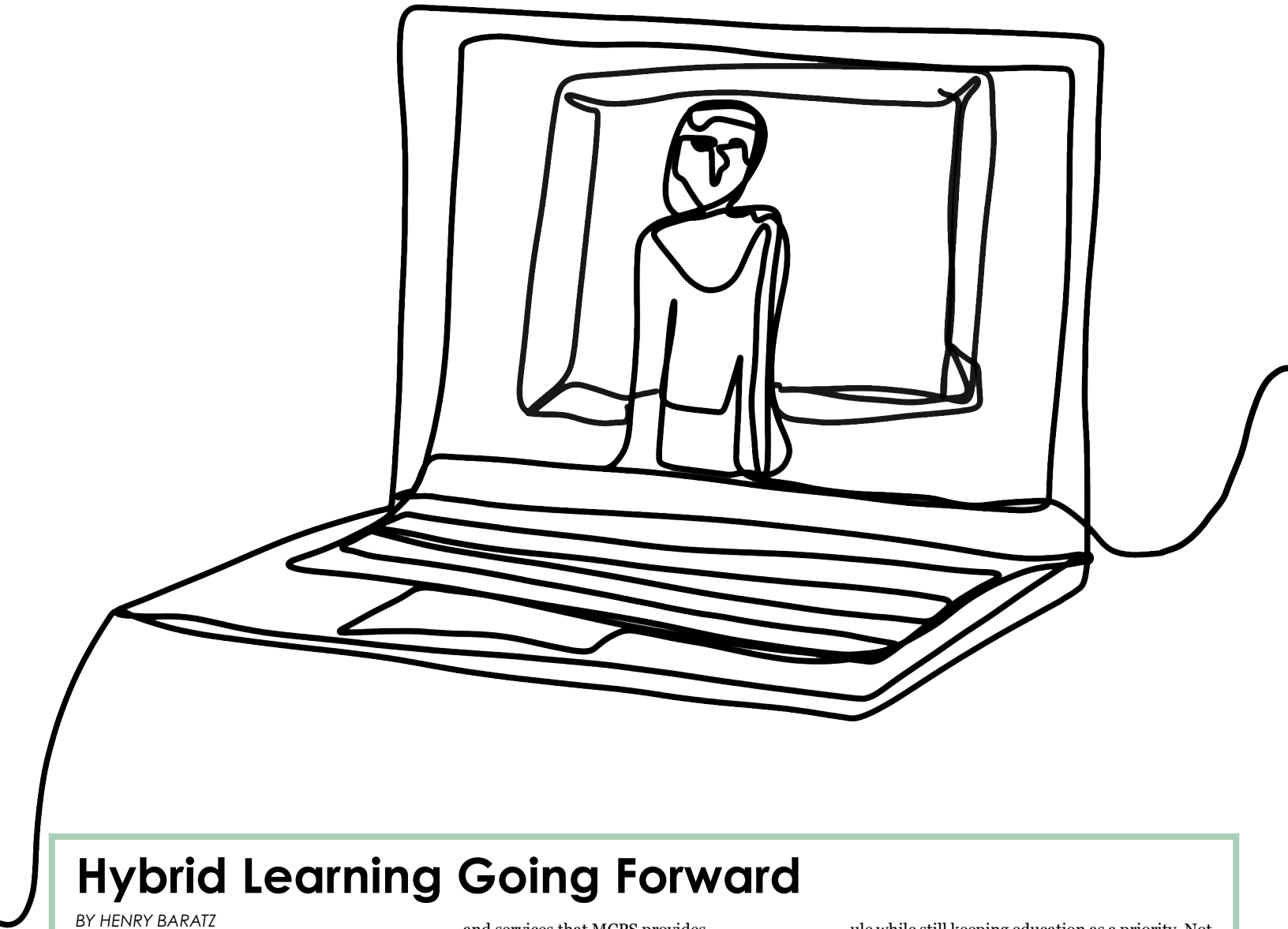
and create a false image of how smart and/or hard working a student is.

The entire system, and the idea of grading itself, should be abolished. Instead, schools should focus on the development of their students as learners and making learning an enjoyable experience for students. Grades add unnecessary pressure to kids' lives. If schools were to abolish grades, general depression and anxiety rates would significantly decrease. Also, without the intensity that grades bring to the learning environment, students would actually take in information and be able to use it later in life. This is in great contrast to the current system in which students are asked to memorize way too much in-

formation at once and then throw it up on a test.

The goals of the current system are for students to archive information they learn and evaluate academic performance; it does neither of these things proficiently. Nowadays, students will study for hours for a test, simply to make their grade go up a couple of percentage points. After the test, with the concept covered and their grade secured, their brain simply disposes of all that information. This makes no sense. Students should be taught concepts in depth and over time. Overall, labeling students with a letter or number misrepresents them and puts an unnecessary and overwhelming weight on their shoulders.





## Hybrid Learning Going Forward

BY HENRY BARATZ

2020 has brought about many influxes in the world of technology, and when it comes to education, technology has often served as a barrier for select students to succeed. As the pandemic progresses, more solutions are being brought to the forefront of academic planning, including hybrid-learning models and fully adapted virtual classrooms.

Montgomery County Public Schools have been fully virtual this school year thus far, with teachers and students replicating the classroom experience via Zoom, Canvas, and various online education platforms.

Students have complained about the accessibility and out-of-touch feeling that a completely virtual learning environment presents. In an online classroom, issues such as the technology barrier and screen time have been at the forefront of discussion, as well as home learning environments and access to certain programs, meals,

and services that MCPS provides.

While online school forces students to fend for themselves in a virtual manner, it also applies real-world problem-solving skills and challenges individuals to strive for a strong work ethic as well as independent management. Moreover, it allows students to have more flexibility with their schedule, clubs, jobs, and extracurricular activities. I fully agree that the pandemic limits outside opportunities to connect with students and teachers, however, if a vaccine is introduced and cases plummet, several opportunities to form relationships can take place outside the classroom while maintaining a virtual element to our schooling.

Given the benefits and drawbacks of an online learning platform, I propose a permanent hybrid approach to learning as a lasting way of education, regardless of pandemic status. Students will have the choice of which format of learning best fits their needs and accommodates their sched-

ule while still keeping education as a priority. Not only will this make communication more efficient and transparent to students, but it will also provide opportunities for students who missed class to catch up on missing assignments without facing any consequences.

Logistically, a hybrid approach would likely consist of implementing a camera in the classroom for the teacher to interact with some students in-person and others via Zoom. This may come as a challenge to teachers, however, if done right, it can yield outstanding results for both teachers and students, as they have the option to learn/teach in the best way that can help further their academic success. This may seem like an extreme technocentric approach to the future of the education system, but given the chaos of 2020, it can provide equity within MCPS and help ensure that every individual is able to grow and gain a valuable education experience going forward.

# Beyond the Classroom



## Changing Sports' Culture

BY TOBIAS BERLINSKI AND ANDREW NEALIS

Like so many businesses in America, professional sports leagues have scrambled to return responsibly. COVID-19 protocols were put in place. Contracts were renegotiated with temporary opt-out clauses. New financial opportunities were created to compensate for the absence of ticket sales.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has long been considered the forefront of cultural change. This year was no different. In March, the NBA promptly shut down all operations and did not resume play until August. The league made player safety a priority by containing players in a bubble, quarantining for two weeks before being able to train with their respective teams. With all these precautions in place, the NBA made it through the playoffs with no players testing positive for COVID-19.

In addition, the NBA was at the forefront of addressing political and social issues. Teams painted courts with statements in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Players added social messages to the backs of their jerseys. Af-

ter the killing of 29-year old Jacob Blake at the hands of police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, players went on strike just as their second round of playoffs were set to begin. The NBA worked closely with the NBPA, the players association, in planning how play could resume while keeping the attention on prevalent issues.

The WNBA also followed suit and generated waves of social change. Namely, the Atlanta WNBA team publicly endorsed Democratic candidate Raphael Warnock — the opponent of incumbent Georgia senator and Atlanta Dream owner Kelly Loeffler — in August. Their support proved instrumental in Warnock's victory over Loeffler and the Democrats' successful efforts to take control of the U.S. Senate.

Other leagues have seen dramatic cultural change of their own this year. Notably and close to home, the Washington Redskins formerly changed their name to the Washington Football Team in July. The debate and backlash over the team's name, which many thought were derogatory, had been building for years. But, it was during the tumultuous events of 2020 that the

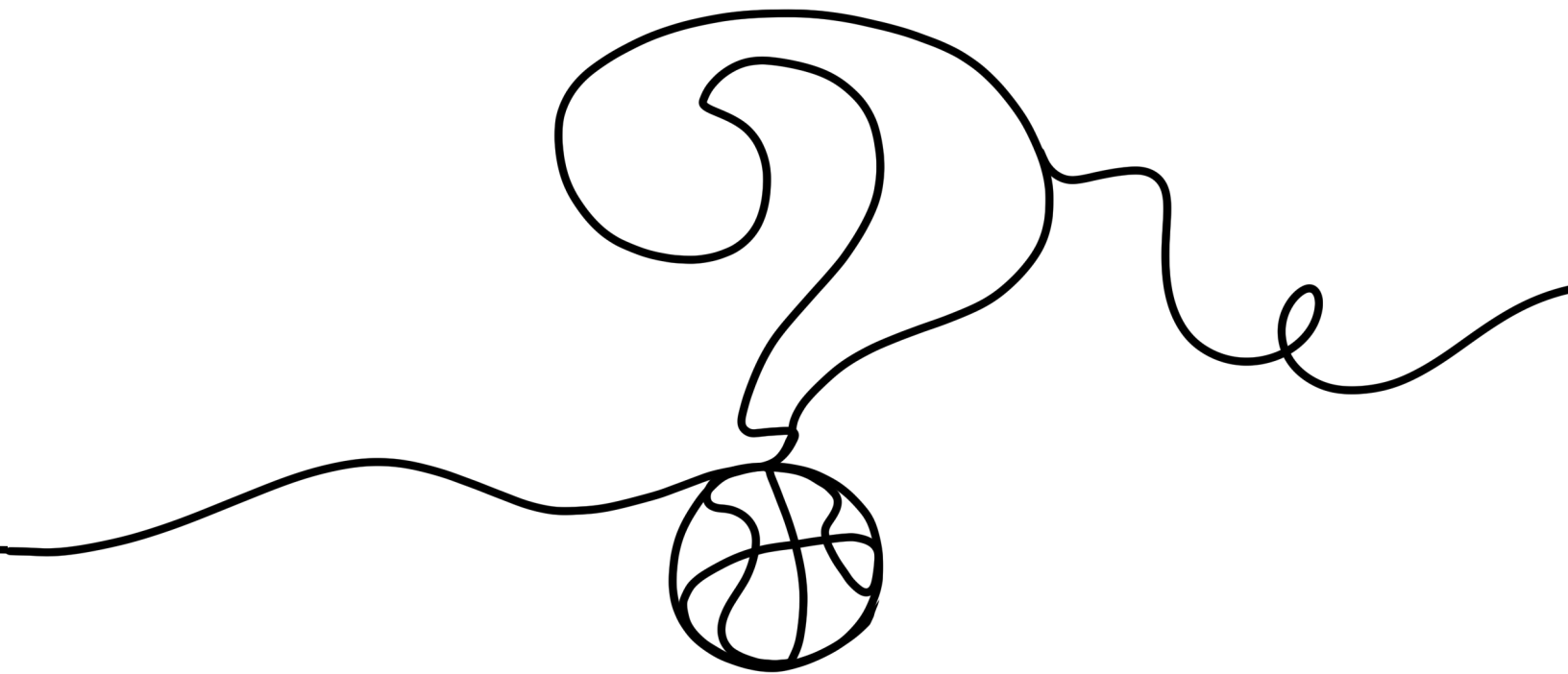
change was ultimately forced upon them by major business partners of the team, like Nike and FedEx who agreed to not associate with the team until the name was changed.

Despite the Washington Football team's name change, the NFL, in contrast to the NBA and WNBA, lags miles behind in terms of social and cultural progress. The NFL has consistently sidelined issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement. And, while the NBPA is constantly involved in discussion with NBA league administrators, the NFLPA is often swept to the side by teams and league executives when decisions are made.

Moving forward, professional leagues in America need to emulate the efforts of the NBA and WNBA. Relations between league administrators, team executives, and players in leagues like the NFL need to be improved; moreover, they need to make a push in providing players with an adequate voice in political issues.

Following the best models set by professional leagues throughout America, MCPS needs to change its own culture of sports.

# Sports Before School: Can it Happen?



BY AIDEN FRANZE

For student-athletes at B-CC, there has been one thing on their minds for the past eight months. The one thing they've strived long and hard for, the one thing that will give them a chance to make all they've worked for worth it, and the one thing they miss most. A season.

When schools began to shut down, so did the seasons for student-athletes. As time progressed, the cancellation of that one spring season has since turned into the fall season and winter season being put on hold as well as a newly modified spring season.

In the current world, the idea of coming back to normal life sounds too good to be true. Crowded places, no masks, in-person school, and of course, sports. While some of those may be just a hopeful future, others could be a possibility sooner than one may think. School coming back in a time like this can't work, at least not at the current moment. Placing 2,000 students in a building while containing a virus just is not an option. But the question is, what about 20 students? Could sports come back before school? Many professional sports leagues have managed to make do with constant COVID-19 tests at their disposal, with some leagues using so-called "bubbles" to live in. While it's unrealistic to expect a school to be able to compare to these aspects, they might not need to for this to work.

Many private schools are currently under similar precautions as B-CC and other public schools in the area, living in a full virtual learning environment—aside from one difference; sports. Miles Harmon, a junior at St. Albans High School, is one student who has been allowed to continue his sport despite school remaining online. But how does this work? Harmon said he

does "three to four days a week of in-person practices, depending on the coach's schedule." As of now, St. Albans is sticking to just practices, but in-person competition is hopefully set to return by February.

"Given the groups being only 20-30 people for a team, an enforcement of distance between players and continuous mask-wearing has been enough to keep the team virus free and safe," said Harmon.

"If anyone is to feel at all sick they are forbidden from coming to practice." These precautions don't appear to be strict, but seem to be working, which poses the question: Can this work at B-CC?

Student opinions, coaches' concerns, as well as the needed precautions are all leading factors that need to be considered when the county thinks through this idea of coming back. Mr. Young, a teacher, and the Cross Country and Track and Field coach at B-CC gave his thoughts on the matter, "it could work if students and coaches work outside, wear masks, and keep distance," said Young. Nevertheless, Young said that he also "thinks it is tricky at the moment with numbers of infections rising," and the most important thing to do is "to listen to the local health officials and take their advice seriously." We can't let our eagerness get the best of us as "emotion and a desire to get back out there is too present," said Young. Aside from that, Young said that if it is safe, and "given that precautions are taken, such as being outside, wearing masks, keeping distance and limiting the number of participants at a time, that [he] might be comfortable returning." Mr. Young has a hope to go back, but safety and precaution take priority.

Many students have similar views to Young on the matter. Robin Mills, a junior and player on

the Women's Varsity Soccer team at B-CC, said she "would love to return to sports if we could figure out a way to do it safely." Mills said that she and her team "have already been doing pick up games and distanced captain practices." These student-organized games and practices have worked very well, Mills later added, saying everyone respects each other's distances and wears masks. Mills said she believes sports could return if they "were along those lines."

Teddy Fisher, a junior at B-CC and member of the Men's Junior Varsity Baseball team, said, "we need to get back some normalcy, and MCPS needs to provide a plan for sports even if we aren't in school in person quite yet." Furthermore, Fisher said, "we need to prepare for this scenario." Nevertheless, despite his eagerness, Fisher agreed that precautions must be enacted for this to be a reality. Fisher said, "if we could get tested often and wear masks when in close quarters that would be effective."

In-person school seems too risky right now—2,000 students plus teachers and faculty would be a recipe for disaster. Be that as it may, some sort of abbreviated in-person sports season might work, similar to numerous private schools including St. Albans High School. It's also clear that these private schools, as Harmon said, aren't doing any precautions that B-CC couldn't personally incorporate. Masks, social distancing, and temperature checks are all easy yet seemingly effective precautions thus far and are precautions B-CC could easily adopt. MCPS has a lot of factors to consider, but given proper precautions and a lowering in the number of cases provided by health officials, the athletes at B-CC just might get that season they long for... hopefully.

# More Co-Ed Sports

BY COLLIN BIRKS AND MYLES SAMPSON

Men and women have almost always been divided while playing sports. Here at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, there are already a few co-ed sports teams. Some people believe there should be more mixed-gender teams, while others disagree.

One athlete at B-CC had this to say on the topic, "I don't have anything against co-ed sports, but I'm not for co-ed sports either." He says he wouldn't be opposed to having co-ed sports as an option, but he, personally, would not participate in them. He says that he feels mixed-gender sports are not necessary when teams have always been separated in the past. He also adds that "boys will generally have a physical advantage over girls," which could potentially create an

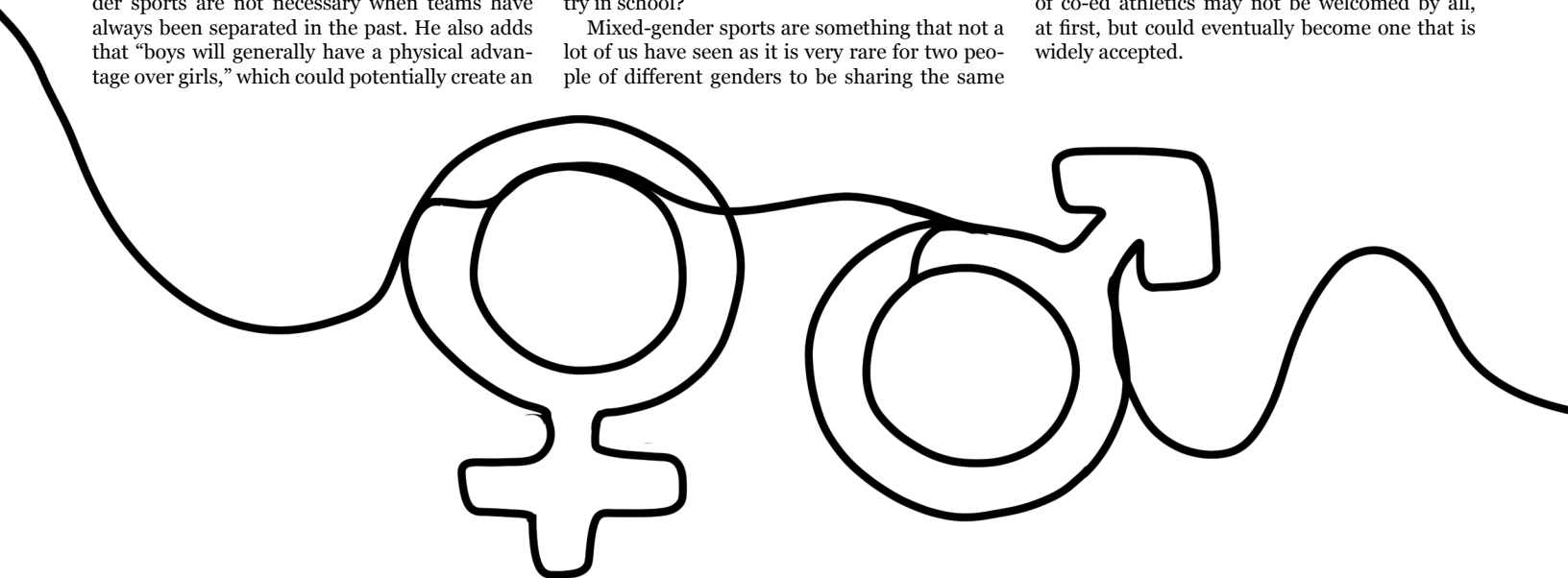
issue in fairness within the more physically challenging sports.

Senior tennis player Ana Carmer believes that certain sports, like tennis and basketball could easily be offered as co-ed sports in high school. For tennis, "there would be singles matches where girls and guys play each other" she said. Carmer has competed on a tennis team outside of school with both boys and girls and she said the integration of mixing the genders was smooth and easy. She says this was an experience that she loved. If this has already been a success in some areas outside of school, why not give it a try in school?

Mixed-gender sports are something that not a lot of us have seen as it is very rare for two people of different genders to be sharing the same

field. Seeing as this has been something that has already been done for other sports and worked, it could be a great addition into the more well known ones.

Co-ed sports could be incorporated at B-CC as early as next year. There are already some mixed-gender sports, such as handball and bocce, but it could be implemented into many more. Track and cross country are also somewhat co-ed. There are separate teams for girls and boys, however the runners all train collectively. This could either replace the current separated teams, or be offered as an alternate option. The idea of co-ed athletics may not be welcomed by all, at first, but could eventually become one that is widely accepted.



## An Interview with B-CC Athletic Director Mr. Krawczel

BY TATE SMYTH

Due to this school year being completely virtual so far, it has been difficult for new students and new staff members alike to become familiar with the school. B-CC's new Athletic Director, Michael Krawczel, is one of these new faces. Coming from Quince Orchard High School, he previously was a coach for both the volleyball and baseball teams.

These positions gave him experience at the lower athletic department levels, helping to prepare Krawczel for the head position for the B-CC athletics department. He shared his love of watching football, giving an insight into the plans that he and the other members of the athletic department have for this year.

With so much uncertainty during this unprecedented time, there are important questions that B-CC students have about how their sports will be handled in the coming months. Many have been wondering how the athletic seasons will be arranged in springtime.

While winter sports are officially canceled, there is still a chance that there will be shortened seasons for spring and fall teams. According to Krawczel, this will all be dependent on the

COVID-19 numbers in Montgomery County in the spring months.

"There would be a google form to complete and [we] would need [athlete's] [temperatures] taken before practice," said Krawczel, referring to some safety protocols that may be put in place if in-person practices were to start again.

There will be regular testing measures taking place, as well as mask requirements for these athletes. Sports such as baseball and tennis are some of the ones with more promise for covid safe execution, due to the capacity for little contact. If the county's numbers are at a stable spot, seasons for these and other teams would most likely take place over seven-week periods, a number that is subject to change. For now, the priority for Mr. Krawczel and the other members of B-CC's athletic department is online seasons. Many of these are up and running at the moment, with fall online seasons having already taken place. While certainly not ideal, they hope that these online meetings with teammates can provide some team bonding and experience that students can't currently get in person. Depending on team preference, coaches can schedule multiple meetings a

week to go over film, build team chemistry, and plan workouts together. The county isn't allowing in-person team workouts, so online organization of individual workouts can be key in keeping players engaged and in shape, as it's difficult for many right now to get in a workout, due to so many facilities being shut down. Hopefully, in-person workouts can be phased in if students begin returning to school.

"The top priority is the safety of all involved," said Krawczel. "If it's safe, the next priority is in-person sports."

Despite the challenges that this school year has been faced with, Mr. Krawczel is staying ready and on top of things to make sure we get as much safe athletics as possible.

"The spring season is the top priority [coming up], due to being canceled last year," said Krawczel.

While this is a lot to ask of a first-year department head, Mr. Krawczel assured us that he is doing everything he can to get B-CC athletes reunited with the sports they love.



# Freshman Teams

BY STEFANO FENDRICH, CHASE MCCULLOH,  
AND CONNOR SAPIN

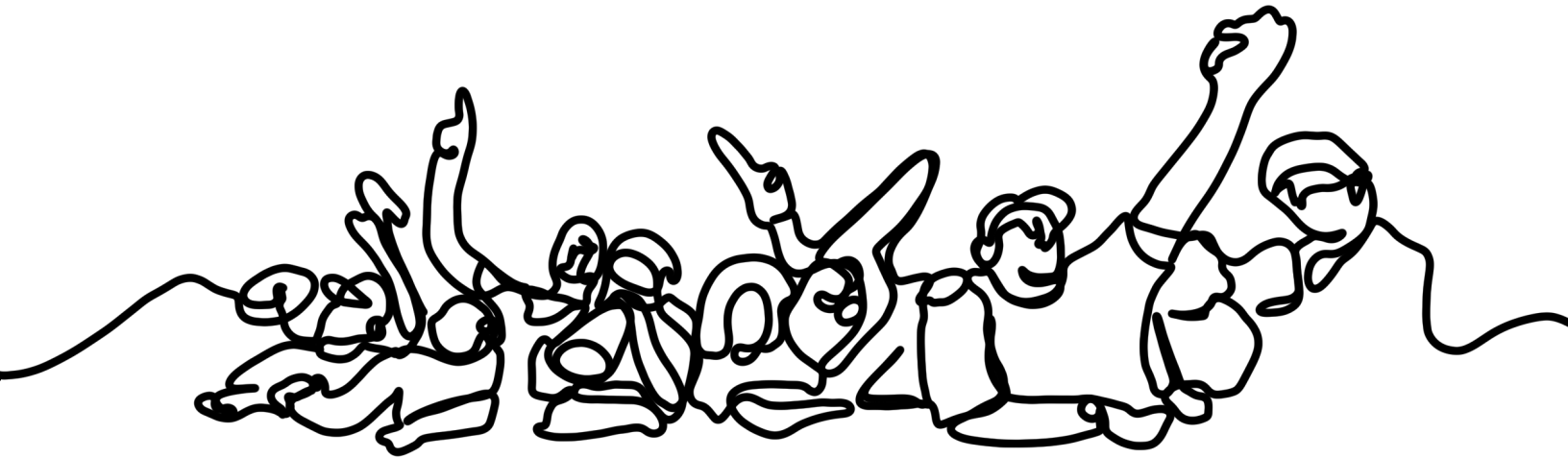
To many students, sports is one of the most important parts of their high school experience. Every year, students try out in the hopes of competing for the school team, but many are rejected.

Recently, there has been discussion regarding the potential introduction of freshman teams in MCPS. These teams would be composed of only freshmen and be an option at every high school, giving younger students a better chance to represent their school through sports. This allows more students to participate in high school ath-

letics and sharpen their skills to continue playing the sport they love. Playing on a high school team won't only help them improve at their sport, but will teach them valuable life lessons and introduce them to people they would not have met otherwise. The implementation of these teams would also effectively allow more students to become active in the school community. Each year, many freshmen end up getting cut from teams, not because they were bad at their sport, but because they are competing against older, more experienced students for a spot on the roster. Having freshman teams would allow more of these

students to participate in school athletics.

For some sports, like football, this might be hard to accomplish, as there are not enough students trying out to fill two teams, let alone three. Although there are some logistics to work out, the introduction of freshman teams would be a progressive adaptation to high school athletics and is a chance for MCPS to provide freshmen with more opportunities. If implemented correctly, freshman teams would be a great addition to B-CC and Montgomery County as a whole.



# Fans in the Stands

BY JONAH PACHMAN

High school sports in Montgomery County have not seen competition since the beginning of March, and athletes are eager to get back to the playing field. As more news comes in regarding potential start dates, more athletes are wondering whether they will take the field in 2020. Still, what about the students who used to show up to football games or basketball games and cheer on their classmates? Are their high school traditions going to be thrown away as well, and even if they are not, would those students still want to engage? The questions and concerns regarding this are still up in the air, waiting for an answer. More and more time has gone by since the start of the year, and with 2020 coming to an end, the student body is ready to be involved again.

High school students have long attended athletic events, and it has always been an exciting tradition to go to football games on Friday nights. As most people are aware, high school football games are filled with laughter, excitement, and general engagement. However, due to COVID-19 being in play, there are going to be limits on the number of people that can attend games. Students are also not oblivious to the fact that there is a pandemic, and odds are a good percentage of the student body will opt out of attending sport-

ing events because to some people it simply is not worth the risk. More so, if student-athletes are barely allowed to play organized sports on the field, how is it expected that other students fill the stands? The fact that officials still can't provide concrete answers to basic concerns regarding sports should mean that maybe it is not a good idea for students to be in attendance if sporting events are held this school year.

The biggest idea to be considered is if students were allowed to attend games, would any of them feel safe. It is only possible to infer now given that the possibility of attending games is still a long shot, but the question can be answered based on how students are currently acting. As of right now, everyone, including students, has had a tough time adapting to new circumstances. Simple pleasures in life, like eating inside restaurants, are frowned upon. If people don't even feel safe eating inside a restaurant, then what are the odds that they would want to attend a football game? In the end, it is all up to the administration to decide whether or not sports will be played out this year. However, there should be thought that is put into this decision.

Let's say the schools do decide to open the stands once games get underway. The situation would most likely be as follows; the very few

students that are allowed to attend would have to wear a mask at all times. Also, every student would have to distance from one another, as this is the general protocol. There would be little to no interaction with one another, so the desire of students to go to games would be minimal. School spirit is something that every student wants to partake in, but when they are doing it in their little pod in the stands, the excitement goes away.

A potential solution to this issue could include either not opening the stands at all and doing what most of the professional sports leagues did. That is the safest solution, but with this comes the fact that no one would be able to support the players. That is where the second solution comes into play; if students wanted to and felt safe attending games. Then they could open up the stands to a limited capacity, say forty percent. This would allow some school spirit and player support, but it would also ensure some safety as well. If the county does opt for the fans in the stands approach, then it is likely that this will be the route that they will end up taking. At the end of the day, high school sports events and school festivities are always exciting, but students will most likely have to decide whether they choose spirit over safety.

# Should Homecoming Continue to be Connected to Just Football at B-CC?

BY ANDREW LEBOWITZ

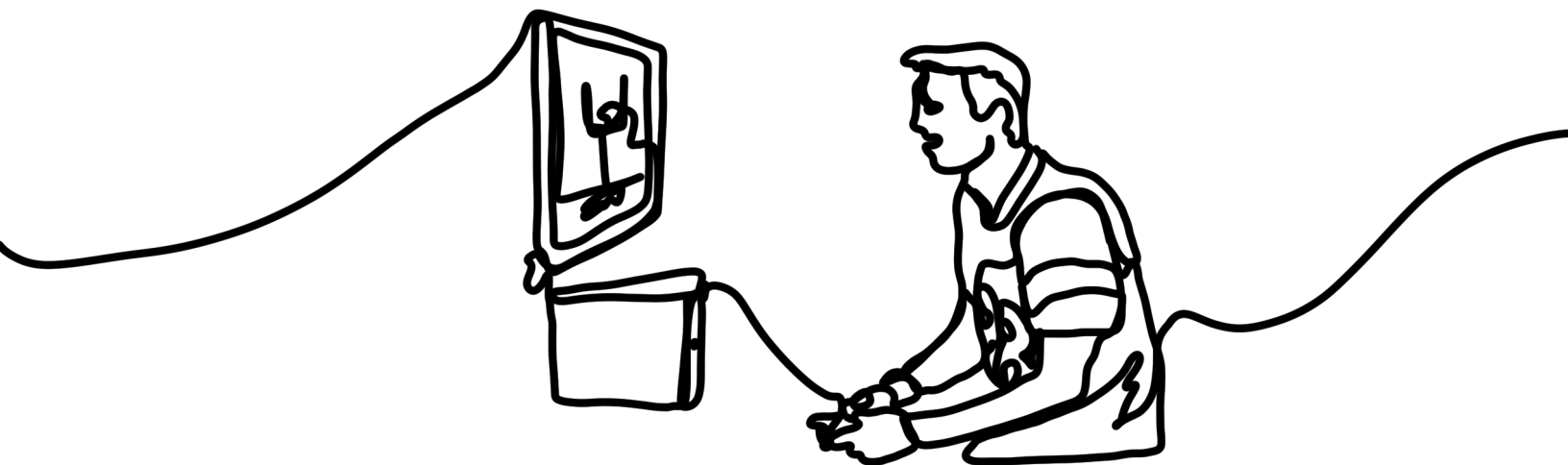
Along with the dance, football has always been the pinnacle of homecoming at B-CC. So why should we change the sport now? Many people are saying that we should be more inclusive to other fall sports such as soccer, baseball, and more. The truth is, however, that if we bring in a different sport for homecoming, all of the other teams that did not get selected will be upset. This would just bring more controversy overall. Thus, we would need to have separate homecoming games for all fall sports teams at BCC. While this idea would be very inclusive, it takes away the significance and excitement on homecoming day. In years past, homecoming football games

have been packed with fans, including large numbers of students, staff, and even local Baron fans. The crowds would roar with great passion, win or loss, and everyone would stick around for the ceremony afterwards.

There's no doubt that homecoming should just feature one main sporting event. The question still remains however, why football? In recent years, BCC football has not been very prosperous. In other sports, though, we have had extremely successful, contending teams such as in men and women's soccer. Despite all this, the homecoming game is more about filling the stands as much as possible with excited BCC students. Football is the most popular/viewed sport in America,

and the majority of students are more likely to be interested in watching a football game than any other sport, no matter the quality of play. Tradition also plays a huge role in this whole controversy. High school homecoming and its relationship with football has existed since the 1920s, all across the United States.

While having homecoming tied to football isn't the most inclusive thing, changing the sport or adding all fall sports to the agenda would only cause homecoming to lose some of its significance and a tradition that has lasted in America for nearly one hundred years.



## The Rise of Esports: The Socially Distant Way to Stay Engaged

BY JOSH SHWEIKI

Over the past few years, the world of competitive, organized video gaming, known as Esports, has rapidly grown in popularity all over the world. This newfound method of playing sports has gained many followers, and is played by approximately 560 million people worldwide. By 2022, the massive industry of Esports is projected to be worth around 1.8 billion dollars. Since 1998, there has been an annual 40% growth in players each year. This phenomenon has received so much traction that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were in-person tournaments for enthusiastic players and fans. Although the pandemic has put in-person tournaments on hold, Esports has still gained popularity as people are able to play together remotely during quarantine.

Like most sports, there is an incentive to win. For every professional tournament, there is prize money involved. Notably, a 16-year-old boy named Kyle Giersdor won 3 million dollars for winning a large Fortnite tournament. Following Kyle's success, a huge wave of children, teens, and adults started playing more video games at

a rate that had never been seen before. Attention to the sport has grown to the point that there are even 15 colleges throughout the country that are now offering scholarships to students for Esports. This practice of colleges offering scholarships further incentivizes children to play endless hours of video games.

One positive impact from the phenomenon of Esports is the social outlet that it provides to teenagers throughout the world in the midst of the challenges caused by the pandemic. It allows the opportunity to make friendships and social friend groups while being in the comfort of their own homes. Especially over this unpredictable and scary time, video games can be a great and safe outlet to hang out with friends.

Although Esports has been great for helping people stay busy and have fun in these difficult times, the negative side is that it causes people to sit in one place for a long period of time and also may cause some students to fall behind on their schoolwork due to gaming too much. There is also the uncertainty of not knowing who exactly is on the other end of the gaming console. With

the right amount of parent-supervision, self-control, and awareness, however, Esports gamers can find a fun social outlet to spend their time responsibly and safely.

As school remains virtual, MCPS has limited options when it comes to keeping students involved through extracurricular endeavors. Esports could be something introduced as an alternative to in-person activities. This would be an effective way for students to interact in an engaging and fun way, while also remaining safe and protected from COVID-19. One logistical issue would be the investment and distribution of gaming consoles, however, this concern should be relatively low given the number of students who already play. MCPS already provides students with financial aid under certain circumstances, so there is the possibility that they could find ways to accommodate students for this purpose. With that in mind, Esports would be a great sport to put into effect for MCPS students, just as the activity continues to gain attention from other students across the world.

# Hot Take: B-CC Should Have Uniforms



GRAPHICS BY CARMEN LOPEZ FERNANDEZ

BY SOL DAVILA GEHRING & CARMEN LOPEZ FERNANDEZ

Think of how much money and time students could save if they didn't have to worry about picking out an original outfit for school every single day. There is a poster in the counseling office that says, "30 years from now it won't matter what shoes you wore, how your hair looked, or what jeans you bought. What will matter is what you learned and how you used it." Many students don't think twice when they see this poster, but there is actually truth behind this corny message. Students often feel pressure to buy and wear the latest trends in order to fit in. The time that is

spent worrying about outfits could be saved if people were given uniforms. In the classrooms and down the hallways, no one would be able to point out which students had more money, and everyone could be judged based on their character and personality instead.

If this were implemented, multiple unisex uniform options would be available, and open to all. More "feminine" uniforms would not be restricted solely to female students, and the same applies to "masculine" options. Skirts, pants, sweatpants, vests, sweaters, sweatshirts, shirts, socks, etc. would be available to all, and students would get to decide which design is the best fit

for them. Everyone would be free to mix and match different articles of clothing offered from the uniforms. Fashion in high school can lead to competitiveness, judgment, and comparison, but it can also be an outlet for creativity and personality, so a variety of uniform options would allow uniqueness and expression while eliminating competition. Another thing that would permit for personal expression would be the allowance of accessories.

Ideally, uniforms would be designed by Barons for Barons. This would ensure that creative freedom would be upheld and the student body would have a say on the style of the uniforms.

# Be the Change





# The Fight to Lower the Voting Age: An Interview with Tyler Okeke

BY NIKKI MIRALA

At the forefront of the fight to lower the voting age is Tyler Okeke, a 19-year-old activist from California and former Student Member of the Board of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), working to ensure that the voice of the youth is represented nationwide.

Okeke's position in activism and politics began in his sophomore year of high school when he applied to serve on the Los Angeles mayor's youth council for his region. The following year, he ran for Student Member of the Board and served in his second year on the council where he worked to combat prominent issues such as gun violence. He then became involved with Power California, an organization dedicated to amplifying the voice of young people of color and their families to ensure that everyone is fairly represented in our government and that voters and elected leaders mirror the rich diversity that is California. Once he got involved with Power California, he became familiar with the concept of voting at 16-years-old. "I introduced it to his local school board (LAUSD), and that created an opportunity for us to collaborate and work together when it comes to expanding youth voting rights," said Okeke, "and that's work I've been doing ever since."

In April of 2018, he introduced studying the feasibility of lowering the voting age to 16 which sparked nationwide discourse about lowering the voting age, but due to COVID-19, the idea has unfortunately been put on the "policy back burner." This summer, Okeke worked to create a California statewide coalition to support local and statewide measures to lower the voting age. With significant legislative advocacy and lobbying, Proposition 18, a measure that will allow 17-year-olds who turn 18 by the general election to vote in primary and special elections, will move forward to be voted on. Two other measures will advance as well; Measure G allows 16 and 17-year-olds in San Francisco to vote in municipal elections, and Measure QQ would extend the right to vote in school board elections to 16 and 17-year-olds in the city of Oakland.

While Okeke and organizations such as Power California are confident in their efforts to present youth with the opportunity to vote, many unfortunately aren't as eager. Some worry about the lack of life experiences a 16-year-old may have, while others speculate that they aren't aware of the democratic process. Okeke, however, was assertive in the idea that this new generation of voters would be more than capable in determining who is best fit to serve them and represent them in government.

"We are a generation that was brought up in the age of school shootings--in the age of vulnerable school campuses." He continues, "we were brought up in the age of white supremacy and fascism with the election of Donald Trump, so these have been deeply formative years for all of us, and we are informed by all of the things we've seen in action." According to Okeke, there's no lack of information when it comes to what young people know about the world around them and their ability to make informed, long-lasting decisions.

"Because of the generation that we are and growing up as one of the most digitally connected and diverse generations to come, we have experienced these things much more deeply with more nuance than someone would have 10 years ago because of our access to, not only, knowing the issues in our community but issues around the world," said Okeke.

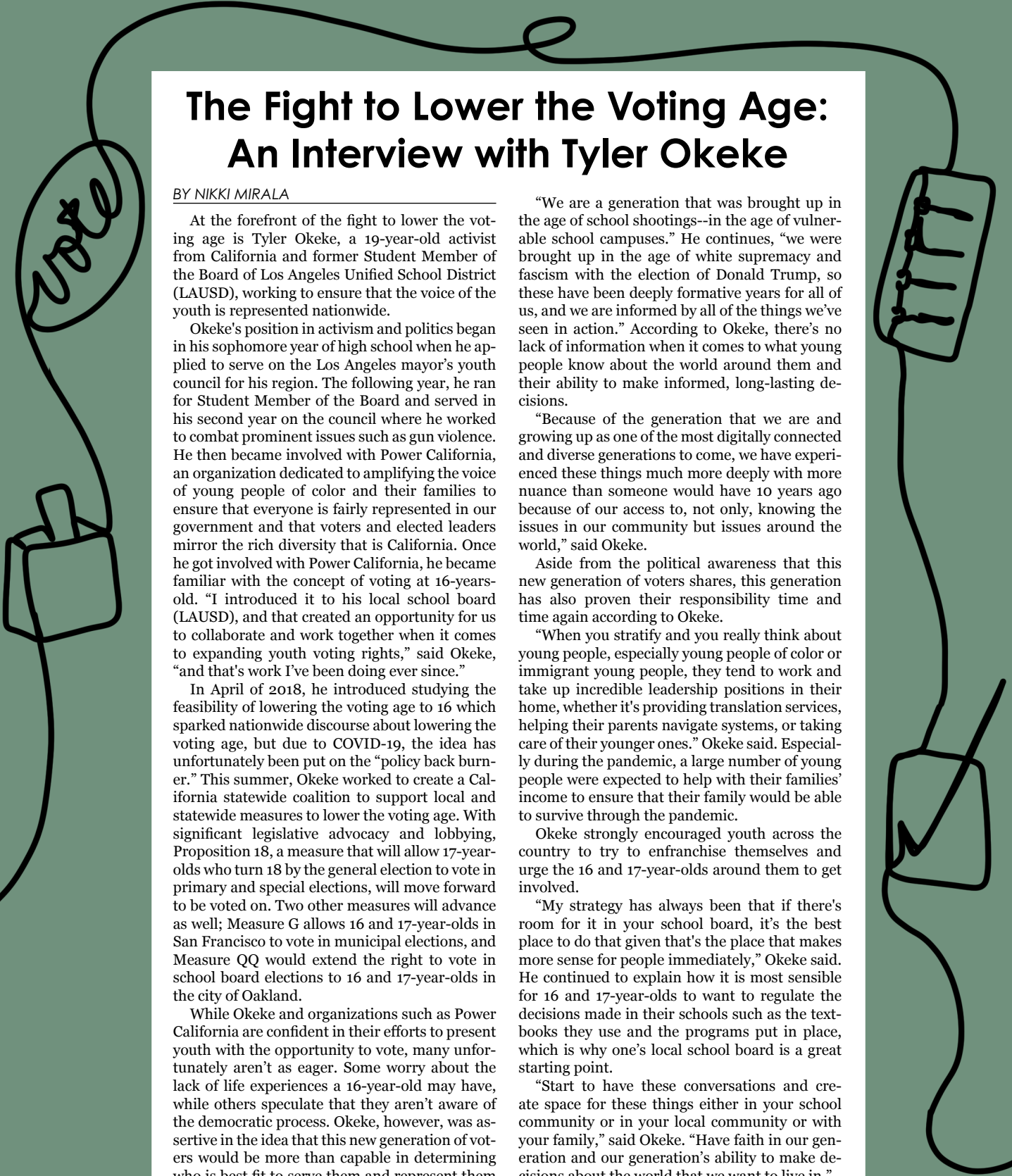
Aside from the political awareness that this new generation of voters shares, this generation has also proven their responsibility time and time again according to Okeke.

"When you stratify and you really think about young people, especially young people of color or immigrant young people, they tend to work and take up incredible leadership positions in their home, whether it's providing translation services, helping their parents navigate systems, or taking care of their younger ones." Okeke said. Especially during the pandemic, a large number of young people were expected to help with their families' income to ensure that their family would be able to survive through the pandemic.

Okeke strongly encouraged youth across the country to try to enfranchise themselves and urge the 16 and 17-year-olds around them to get involved.

"My strategy has always been that if there's room for it in your school board, it's the best place to do that given that's the place that makes more sense for people immediately," Okeke said. He continued to explain how it is most sensible for 16 and 17-year-olds to want to regulate the decisions made in their schools such as the textbooks they use and the programs put in place, which is why one's local school board is a great starting point.

"Start to have these conversations and create space for these things either in your school community or in your local community or with your family," said Okeke. "Have faith in our generation and our generation's ability to make decisions about the world that we want to live in."



# How Can We Be More Equitable?



Exposure to systemic racism in the education system has become more evident in the past years. This exposure to the disparities among students, in part due to the pandemic, has been reaching wider audiences and at a much faster pace. The opportunity gap is clearly still

prevalent within the school system. There is no question that many changes need to take place. However, students are no longer waiting for it to happen, they are creating the change themselves. Students have been ruthlessly attacking inequity within our systems, by working with administra-

tors and educators, and by creating initiatives that they believe are important. We have included many of the topics students believe need to be touched upon or call for further progression.

## Engaging Younger Students In Equity Discussions

BY JULIA BUTLER

When tackling equity issues, it is important that we focus not only on high school students, but elementary and middle school youth as well to ensure that they understand racism and how to combat it. It is evident that implicit biases run deep, and students need an anti-racist education from a young age. Racism is a learned behavior; young children are at a critical stage in their lives where everything that they see and hear will stick

with them. In guiding and teaching them how to be actively anti-racist, we can help improve our community and larger society.

Through Youth for Equity, we are working with younger students in the B-CC cluster to educate and engage them in discussions about equity. We have partnered with the two feeder middle schools, Westland and Silver Creek, and plan to expand to the elementary schools in the spring. With the help of Westland administra-

tors, we have held town hall meetings with staff and students on topics including racial equity and equity in online education. We also engaged with students directly in a discussion about identity and racism. In addition, we are working with Silver Creek and their No Place for Hate initiative to address similar topics and the importance of allyship. Our hope is that these discussions will spark increased interest in equity and promote inclusivity from a younger age.

## Equity in Athletics

BY NEHA KOHLI

As seen through recent and historic events, racism and oppression are sown into the fabric of our nation. De-facto segregation continues to persist in our country. This is reflected not only in our school community, but in our athletic teams as well. Our educational environment displays strong divisions along racial and socioeconomic lines. Athletics are commonly viewed as a 'white' activity. Students of color do not always feel accepted into these spaces. In order to create an accepting environment for all students, we united

to take steps towards changing negative aspects of the culture that has been set for generations of high school athletes at B-CC.

Youth For Equity, along with Pompon's Coach, Jessica Prophet, created a plan to improve the environment of athletic teams. We must work towards ensuring that, at tryouts, all feel welcome and are abiding by MCPS policy. Our community should strive to create a team environment where everyone is included and athletic teams truly represent our school's greater diversity. We worked alongside Michael Krawczel, B-CC's

athletic director, to create and implement discussions on implicit biases and racism into athletic teams during the virtual season. Volunteers from Youth For Equity and from sports teams came together to facilitate these conversations. We have strived to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the team environment and will continue to work towards an athletic department which is represented by and accessible to the wider school community.

# Let's Rethink the Cafeteria

BY SAMMER HAJHAMAD

Inside, it is always dark and gloomy. A distasteful smell always lingers around the area. The door makes a banking sound once it shuts as you walk in, almost as if you are trapped. You may be thinking that I am describing a prison, when in reality, this is the truth about the cafeteria within Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. Visitors are often shocked by its state, one noting, "The doors shut behind you when you go in? Wow, does that send all kinds of wrong messages?" If the condi-

tions of our cafeteria have been made known to many important figures in our school, then why has nothing changed?

In B-CC, we are privileged with the amount of funding available to us. However, when thinking about the distribution of those funds, it is clear that a part of our school's demographic is being forgotten. Those that utilize the cafeteria often are our low-income students, which is the same demographic of students that we see having a hard time making their voices heard. That needs

to change. Low-income students are exploited as a means to show off the diversity at B-CC, however, it is time they are truly submerged into the schools culture and are able to be heard. It is not only the responsibility of administration to ensure that changes are made to the cafeteria, but we students also need to destigmatize it.

It is not ghetto. It is not ratchet. It is not nasty. It is a part of our school.

## Reforming the Reporting System

BY OLIVIA ROARK AND ELLA TREVELYAN

In the Youth For Equity (YFE) countywide subgroup, our mission is to create an environment of safety and accountability throughout MCPS. This summer, the anonymous Instagram pages (@survivorsatbcc, @blackatwhitman, etc.) began to publish accounts of injustices and revealed the level of assault, harassment, and discrimination in MCPS. The majority of these instances have gone unreported, uninvestigated, or unpunished, and it's clear to us that the current reporting system is failing its students. Because of this, YFE

Countywide is currently dedicated to reforming the reporting system to reflect students' needs in today's world – including an accessible, online reporting form to replace insufficient existing resources.

In pursuit of this goal, we are currently conducting a countywide survey to collect data about students' experiences with and impressions of the MCPS reporting system. At this moment, we are in the early stages of distributing this form, the data from which will be used in collaboration with MCPS administration to meet existing

student needs. As we work with fellow activist groups, as well as faculty in MCPS to create safety through accountability, we need your help to distribute the form. If you or your friends have experience with the reporting system, please fill out the form linked in the Instagram bio of @youth\_for\_equity. Even if you can't fill out the form, repost our infographic about it on your Instagram story. We see the demand for change in MCPS, and we're dedicated to creating a reporting system that students can trust.

## Introducing Restorative Justice Into Education

BY SAMMER HAJHAMAD

Recently, students have expressed their discomfort within the school systems. As a result, the term "restorative justice" has become a widely popular term surrounding these issues. What does it mean, and why should it matter to us students?

"Restorative justice is a mindset that we're looking to develop and a lens that we're looking to use when navigating our relationships," said the Instructional Specialist of the Restorative Justice Unit, Yael Astor. Astor continued to say, "We seek to center relationships and prioritize them. A part of that is when things go wrong, and they will go wrong, there needs to be an understanding that we are all just humans navigating

this world. But, first and foremost, we will honor or hearing the perspective and point of view of [those] we have harmed. Then the person who caused the harm is reflective, apologetic, and seeking to repair the relationship in an authentic way, by reflecting on the impact and putting intention to the side."

When asking Astor why she found this work important, she said, "So much of what drives me, is being a part of creating spaces where folks feel like they can show up as their whole selves... as I've been able to coach adults through seeing their impact, and just shifts that they could make in their practice that are ultimately opening up space for folks to feel comfortable."

In practice, restorative justice would be essen-

tially, "normalizing naming of identities, sharing our pronouns when we are first getting to know one another, and calling in/calling out," said Astor.

Students, teachers, administrators, and staff, I kindly urge you all to play a role in preventing further hurt from taking place within our community. Ask for someone's pronouns, prior to subjecting them to gender binaries. Reassess your implicit biases now, rather than after committing a discriminatory act. Mistakes are fine, however, remember that they may have a lasting impact on others. As Astor said, "We always want to try to be on the preventative side of restorative justice, rather than responsive."

Our students are making it increasingly clear that our society is quickly changing, and unfortunately, if you are not on board, you will fall behind. Inequity will soon be weeded out, regardless of its deep entanglements. The only question left to ask is...



# Will you be a part of the change?

BACKPAGE

## Fewer Books, More Weights

BY JACKSON HERMES

In 1597, Sir Francis Bacon came up with the expression “knowledge is power,” and for the next 400 or so years that expression would be revered by all the nerds of the world as the truest thing that ever came out of somebody’s mouth. But now it’s 2020, and it’s time for another philosophical truth-bomb dropped by one of the greatest minds on the planet (me).

In my opinion, our society holds our schools to a very different standard than it should. We love to assign arbitrary numbers and percentage points to our students without stopping to consider what these numbers even mean. School has become a place where kids go to memorize impractical formulas and “mathematics” in a time when the real focus should be more modern and meaningful: athletics.

That’s right. We need to revolutionize our

school systems, and the first place to start is the gymnasium. To put it simply, schools shouldn’t be rated or graded based on academic performance. Instead, a much easier metric to follow is the school’s output of Division I athletes. The toxic culture of cramming for tests and quizzes can be thrown away for a healthy (and mandatory) five hours of pumping iron per day! The school can even save money by taping our otherwise useless textbooks onto barbells rather than buying weights!

Modernizing our school system is important. The “out with the old, in with the new” mentality is something that is tried and true throughout human history, and it doesn’t need to stop anytime soon. Our school system can become a sports powerhouse within a couple of years with my proposed changes, and I can only see it as a major win for MCPS.



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## Capitol Security Was Too Weak: It’s Time For Change

BY RUDY ECHAVARRIA

In light of the recent events at the Capitol, the legitimacy of the security in D.C. is being called into question. With a poor performance at keeping bozos from waltzing into one of the most important buildings in the nation, I believe it is time for a new security team. My big idea is for the B-CC security team to replace the current security at the Capitol.

Hardened by years of vicious B-CC hockey and basketball games against Whitman and WJ, they are more than qualified to take on this job. In no way, shape, or form would they have let the

events of January 6th occur if they were on duty. With their extensive experience, they would have been able to diffuse the situation in mere minutes.

It is time for this country to accept that the security team of B-CC would be the ideal replacement for the Capitol’s current team. There has already been a petition made on [change.org](https://change.org) with over 50,000 signatures in support of the proposition.

Our security would protect the legislative branch of our democracy with all their willpower, and it’s time for the change to be made.